NATION

Govt says T'gana tunnel rescue to conclude in 2 days

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

India signs 13 FTAs & 6 pacts with UK

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

Omarzai is star as Afghanistan knock Eng out of tournament

≫ Page: 8 ≪

www.twitter.com/EnglishSalar
www.facebook.com/EnglishSalar
www.instagram.com/dailysalarenglish
youtube.com/@dailysalardigital

SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

Website: salarnews.in www.magzter.com 27 FEBRUARY 2025 | THURSDAY | BENGALURU | 28 SHABAN, 1446 AH Vol 4 | Issue No 58 | Pages: 8

Search on after terrorists fire at army vehicle in J&K

RAJOURI/JAMMU, 26 FEB

An army vehicle came under fire from suspected terrorists in a forward village near the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri on Wednesday, officials said. However, there were no casualties in the brief firing near Phal village in the Sunderbani sector, they added. The terrorists, believed to be hiding in a forest, fired a few rounds at the army vehicle passing through the area, which is considered a traditional infiltration route for militants. The troops returned fire and reinforcements were rushed to neutralise the terrorists, the officials said, adding that a search operation is underway in the area. *—PTI*

K'taka, M'rashtra bus services to resume today

BELAGAVI, 26 FEB

Government bus services between Karnataka and Maharashtra, which were halted on 22 February are expected to resume from Thursday, according to Belagavi Deputy Commissioner Roshan Mohammed. He stated that no untoward incidents had been reported in either State in the past 24 hours, prompting both governments to consider resuming public transportation. As a precautionary measure, buses will operate under police protection, he added. Roshan and Belagavi Superintendent of Police Bhimashankar Guled held a video conference with their Kolhapur counterparts in Maharashtra on Tuesday. *—Salar News*

>>>More on Page 2

Telangana mandates Telugu in all schools

HYDERABAD, 26 FEB

The Telangana government issued orders for making Telugu a compulsory subject for students of 1st to 10th classes in CBSE, ICSE, IB and other boards affiliated schools in the state from the 2025-26 academic year. The order follows the Telangana (Compulsory Teaching and Learning of Telugu in Schools) Act of 2018, which aimed to enforce Telugu education across government, Zilla Parishad, Mandal Parishad, aided, and board-affiliated schools. As majority of schools in Telangana are government schools, Telugu is typically the primary mode of instruction and learning. However, schools that come under non-state boards have largely not been teaching Telugu, according to media reports. *— PTI*

>>>More on Page 4

Woman raped in parked bus at busy Pune stand

The incident took place just 100m away from police station

PUNE, 26 FEB

A 26-year-old woman was allegedly raped inside a stationary state transport bus at the bustling Swargate bus stand in Pune on Tuesday just 100m from a police station, triggering widespread condemnation and demands for swift action.

The suspect, identified as Dattatraya Ramdas Gade, 36, a man with a prior criminal record of theft and chain snatching, remains at large.

The victim, waiting for a bus to Phaltan, Satara district, was approached by Gade around 5.45 am. He reportedly misled her, claiming her bus had arrived at a different platform, and lured her onto an empty "Shiv Shahi" AC bus. Despite the dimly lit interior, he convinced her it was the correct vehicle, subsequently raping her before fleeing.

Deputy Commissioner of Police Smartana Patil confirmed CCTV footage corroborated the woman's account of entering the bus with the accused. The victim did not immediately report the incident, instead boarding a bus to Phaltan. She confided in a friend during the journey, who urged her to report the assault. The woman then disembarked and went to the police station.

The victim, waiting for a bus to Phaltan, Satara district, was approached by Gade around 5.45 am *PHOTO: PTI*

The incident, occurring in a heavily trafficked area, has ignited a political firestorm. Opposition leaders have criticised the Home Department, overseen by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, for its perceived failure to address escalating crime rates in Pune.

NCP (SP) leader Supriya Sule expressed outrage, highlighting the proximity of a police post and routine patrols. "Such an assault at Swargate demonstrates the lack of fear among anti-social elements," she stated, demanding a fast-track trial and severe punishment.

The National Commission For Women took a cognizance of the rape incident and directed police to ensure a fair and time-bound investigation and arrest the accused at the earliest.

Protest turns violent

Protesters led by Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Vasant More on Wednesday vandalised the security office at the Swargate bus station Sena (UBT) workers smashed the window panes and furniture inside the security office while women activists shouted slogans against the BJP-led Maharashtra government over the incident. *—PTI*

PARL TO TAKE A CALL

Life ban for convicted politicians harsh: Centre to SC

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

The Centre has opposed a petition seeking a lifetime ban on politicians convicted in criminal cases, telling the Supreme Court that such a disqualification would be excessive. It argued that the current six-year disqualification period, under Section 8 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, is sufficient to act as a deterrent. The Centre contended that any decision on a lifetime ban is a matter for Parliament, not the courts, as it falls within the legislative policy domain.

In its affidavit, the Centre stated that the plea sought to alter the statute, which is beyond the scope of judicial review. The government further argued that imposing penalties with time limits is constitutionally sound and in line with established legal principles, ensuring proportionality and reasonability. It added that the imposition of a lifetime disqualification would be within Parliament's power, but it is not mandatory to apply such a penalty in every case.

PHOTO: ANI

The petition, filed by advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay, also calls for expediting the disposal of criminal cases against MPs and MLAs. The Centre underscored that the Constitution empowers Parliament to determine both the grounds and duration of disqualification under Articles 102 and 191.

The Supreme Court is reviewing the constitutional validity of Sections 8 and 9 of the Representation of the People Act. *—PTI*

CELEBRATING MAHASHIVRATRI

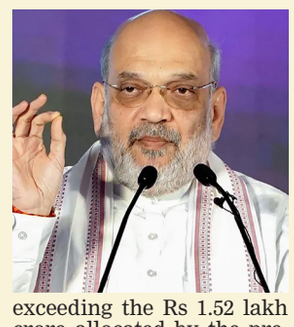
Devotees offer prayers and perform pooja to celebrate Mahashivratri in Bengaluru on Wednesday *PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD*

No reduction in Parl seats due to delimitation: Shah assures South

COIMBATORE, 26 FEB

Union Home Minister Amit Shah assured southern states, including Tamil Nadu, that they will not lose a single Pa2rliamentary seat due to delimitation. His comments came in response to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin's claims that the state could lose 8 of its 39 Lok Sabha seats. Shah clarified that the delimitation process will be conducted on a pro-rata basis, ensuring no reduction in southern states' representation. He further emphasised that any increase in seats would be fairly allocated.

Shah also rejected Stalin's allegations of "injustice" in central fund allocation, stating that the Modi government had provided Tamil Nadu with Rs 5,08,337 crore during 2014-24, far exceeding the Rs 1.52 lakh crore allocated by the previous UPA government. He criticised the Tamil Nadu government for corruption, citing various scandals involving senior DMK leaders. Addressing the law and order situation, Shah accused the state government of harbouring anti-national tendencies and claimed that Tamil Nadu had the worst law and order in the country. *—PTI*



>>>More on Page 3

GOVT MULLS 'UNIVERSAL PENSION SCHEME'

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

The Indian government is planning to introduce a 'universal pension scheme' accessible to all citizens, including those in the unorganised sector, sources from the Labour Ministry revealed on Wednesday. The initiative aims to provide a comprehensive savings and pension framework for construction workers, domestic staff, gig workers, salaried employees, and the self-employed.

Unlike existing schemes such as the Employee Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), contributions to the new scheme will be voluntary, with no government co-contribution. The primary objective is to streamline pension options and possibly merge a few existing schemes into this universal framework, sources said.

However, officials emphasised that the proposed scheme would not replace or subsume the National Pension Scheme (NPS), which is also voluntary. Instead, it would be an additional, flexible option for Indian citizens seeking long-term savings. *—Agencies*

Bidar woman kills spouse with kin's help

BIDAR, 26 FEB

A 30-year-old man, **Sridhar Shivraj**, was allegedly murdered by his wife and her parents on Tuesday in Bachepalli village, Aurad taluk, Bidar. The killing is believed to be the culmination of prolonged domestic abuse, exacerbated by the victim's alcohol consumption.

Sridhar Shivraj, a driver, had married Savita, hailing from the neighbouring village of Ladha, approximately five to six years ago. The couple had two sons. However, their marriage was reportedly marred by frequent disputes, with Sridhar often returning home intoxicated and engaging in heated arguments with his wife.

According to police, Savita, unable to endure the persistent harassment, contacted her parents on 25 February, requesting their presence at her home. A heated confrontation ensued that night, escalating into a violent altercation.

Savita, along with her mother Vijayalakshmi, and her father Shashikant, are accused of assaulting Sridhar.

The attack resulted in severe injuries, leading to his immediate death.

It is alleged that the assailants bound Sridhar's hands and legs with rope before inflicting fatal injuries with an iron rod. They subsequently fled the premises.The victim's father, Shivraj, filed a formal complaint with Santpur Police Station, prompting an immediate investigation.

The police have registered a case and are actively pursuing the suspects. *—Salar News*

AMID CONTROVERSIES

Maha Kumbh ends after 45 days

MAHAKUMBH NAGAR, 26 FEB

The Maha Kumbh Mela, the world's largest religious gathering, concluded on Wednesday in Prayagraj, marking 45 days of intense devotion, faith, and controversy. On the auspicious day of Shivratri, millions of devotees flocked to the Sangam, the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati, to take a ritual dip, believed to cleanse sins and lead to 'moksha' or salvation.

However, the event, which saw a record 64.77 crore pilgrims, was marred by tragedy. A stampede near the Sangam on January 29 claimed at least 30 lives, sparking political blame games. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee described the incident as a 'Mrityu Kumbh', while opposition parties accused the Yogi Adityanath-led government of downplaying the death toll. Despite the tragedy, the crowds continued to grow, with many undeterred by reports of high faecal bacteria levels in the water, which the government denied, claiming the water was fit for both bathing and drinking.

The Kumbh's vast scale was met with unprecedented security measures, including AI-enabled cameras, anti-drone systems, and underwater drones for surveillance. With over 37,000 police personnel and 60,000 staff members, the Mela covered 40 hectares and remained operational 24/7.

Despite the security, there were incidents of fire, although no casualties occurred, thanks to 50 fire stations on standby.

The event also became a political and cultural spectacle. Prominent figures, including President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and celebrities such as Mukesh Ambani, Gautam Adani, and Coldplay's Chris Martin, visited the Mela. Social media influencers-turned-sadhvis and other celebrities attracted attention, with actor Mamata Kulkarni resigning from her position as a 'mahamandelshwashar' of the Kinnar Akhara after controversy. *—PTI*

Rose petals are showered on devotees as they take a holy dip at the Sangam on Mahashivratri during the final snan at Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

Man from Sirsi tests positive for KFD

SIRSI, 26 FEB

After seven cases of Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD) were reported in Chikkamagaluru district earlier this month, a new case has been confirmed in Sirsi taluk, Uttara Kannada district, where a 51-year-old man has tested positive for the virus. This is the first reported case of KFD in Uttara Kannada district this year. Last summer, the disease claimed approximately ten lives in the region. The patient had been undergoing treatment for 15 days at the Revankat Primary Health Centre in Sirsi taluk after his fever failed to subside. *—Salar News*

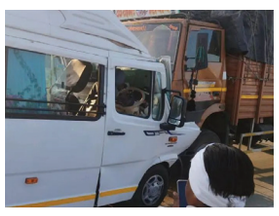


PHOTO: SALAR

15 hurt in accident on way back from Kumbh Mela

BIDAR, 26 FEB

Fifteen people from Bidar district were injured in an accident while returning from the Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, after taking a holy dip. Members of the Bhavasar community from Bidar, Humnabad, Basavakalyan had recently travelled to Prayagraj in a tempo traveller. While returning from the Kumbh Snan, their vehicle collided with an oncoming truck near Wardha. The injured are Anil Daijode, Anita Daijode from Humnabad, Prakash Tandle, Aruna Kalekar, Bhimrao Kalekar, Dilip Kalekar from Bidar, and Anil Sutrave from Basavakalyan. *—Salar News*

CM is like fire; no one can touch him: Minister Zameer

VIJAYANAGARA, 26 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is like fire, no one can touch him or his chair, BZ Zameer Ahmed Khan, a minister in his cabinet, said on Wednesday. He made this statement while rejecting speculations about a leadership change in the state. Similarly, downplaying talks about changing the state Congress President for now, he maintained that everyone would abide by the party high command's decision. "The Chief Minister chair is not vacant now; even the President (Karnataka Congress) post is not empty. DK Shivakumar is occupying the President's post, and Siddaramaiah is occupying the Chief Minister's post. Only if it is vacant can discussions happen," Khan, who is considered close to Siddaramaiah, said in response to a question. Speaking to reporters here, he said, "Can anyone touch Siddaramaiah's chair? It's like fire. If you touch fire, your hands will get burnt." *—PTI*

CM hails Mushtaq's Booker Prize longlist honour

BENGALURU, 26 FEB

Banu Mushtaq's Kannada short story collection making it to the International Booker Prize longlist is a true honour for the State's language and culture, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has said. Karnataka-based writer, activist and lawyer Banu Mushtaq's short story collection 'Heart Lamp', translated from Kannada to English by Deepa Bhasthi, was on Tuesday longlisted for the International Booker Prize 2025 in London. "A proud moment for Kannada literature! Banu Mushtaq's Kannada short story collection has made it to the International Booker Prize longlist — a true honour for our language and culture!" Siddaramaiah said in a post on 'X'. It marks the first time a Kannada title has made it to the longlist of the GBP 50,000 literary prize. *—PTI*

Karnataka-Maharashtra bus services to resume today

The buses will operate under police protection

BELAGAVI, 26 FEB

Government bus services between Karnataka and Maharashtra, which were halted on 22 February are expected to resume from Thursday, according to Belagavi Deputy Commissioner Roshan Mohammed.

He stated that no untoward incidents had been reported in either state in the past 24 hours, prompting both governments to consider resuming public transportation. As a precautionary measure, buses will operate under police protection, he added. Roshan and Belagavi Superintendent of Police Bhimashankar Guled held a video conference with their Kolhapur counterparts in Maharashtra on Tuesday. They noted that tensions over the language dispute, which had strained relations between the two states, were easing.

The meeting followed a discussion between Karnataka Chief Secretary Shalini Rajneesh and her Maharashtra counterpart on Tuesday, DC Roshan added.

According to police, no untoward incidents had been reported in Karnataka and Maharashtra in the past 24 hours **PHOTO: ANI**

Several buses were blackened, affixed with regional flags, and crew members were forced to chant state slogans. The suspension was triggered by an incident on 22 February when Karnataka bus conductor Mahadevappa Hukkeri was assaulted in Balekundri village, Belagavi talukby a group of 7-8 individuals. The attack occurred after Hukkeri requested bus fare in Kannada, but was allegedly forced by a man and his minor sister to respond in Marathi. Hukkeri sustained injuries to his cheek and back and is currently undergoing treatment at a government hospital in Belagavi.

- As tensions escalated, both states resorted to operating buses only up to their respective borders. Passengers had to disembark at the border and board buses from the other state to continue their journey

Following these events, bus services to Maharashtra from Vijayapura and Bagalkot (attached to the Belagavi division) were also withdrawn after similar vandalism incidents were reported in both states.

As tensions escalated, both states resorted to operating buses only up to their respective borders. Passengers had to disembark at the border and board buses from the other state to continue their journey. To facilitate travel, buses were stationed at border points in both states to transport passengers to their destinations. *—Salar News*

No problem with drinking water in K'taka: DyCM

BENGALURU, 26 FEB

PHOTO: ANI

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, who also handles the water resources department, said on Wednesday that there is no shortage of drinking water in the state and that the government is also effectively managing irrigation needs.

"There is no problem with drinking water in the state. We have sufficient drinking water, and we are managing irrigation needs effectively," Shivakumar told ANI.

"During the All-India Water Resources Ministers' Conference in Udaipur, we addressed the Tungabhadra River issue and expressed our desire to build an alternate dam. The concerned ministers held meetings with Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, and I personally spoke with Chandra Babu Naidu. We also emphasised the need to remove silt, which is causing significant difficulties in water storage," he said.

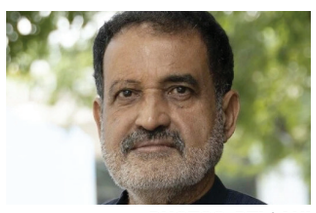
hE asked the Centre to spell out its stand on the Mekedatu balancing reservoir across the Cauvery River in the State.

DyCM dismisses rumours about getting closer to BJP

Dismissing rumours of his growing proximity to the BJP, Shivakumar said he was a born Congressman and there was no way it would change. He also dismissed reports claiming that his visit to Delhi was to seek an extension for his term as the Congress state president. He said reports were "planted". He pointed out that similar stories were doing rounds regarding his trip to to attend the Mahashivaratri celebrations organised by Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev's Isha Foundation. *—ANI*

Priyank hits out at Mohandas for negativity towards Karnataka

BENGALURU, 26 FEB



Priyank Kharge; TV Mohandas Pai **PHOTOS: PTI/ ANI**

IT Minister Priyank Kharge has lashed out at IT industry veteran and former Infosys CFO T V Mohandas Pai, accusing him of promoting "constant negativity" towards both the state and its people.

Noting that his "constant negativity" hurts the state, the Minister for Electronics, IT/BT, while trying to associate Pai with the BJP, urged him to work in the interest of the state.

Kharge was reacting to Pai's post on "X' targeting him and the state government over Bengaluru's infrastructure.

Reacting to Pai's post, Kharge on Tuesday posted that the strain on the city's infrastructure stems from rapid growth and population surge and the government is tackling it with the urgency it deserves.

"I'm sure your leaders might appreciate your constant negativity toward Karnataka and Kannadigas, but believe me, that approach won't bring you any closer to Delhi anytime soon," he said, trying associating Pai with the BJP.

Slamming Pai, Kharge further said, it looks like the former's woes have become painful after Congress got 135 seats in Karnataka assembly polls in 2023. "Why do you remain silent when your #Vishwaguru @narendramodi treats Karnataka with utter disdain?" he asked. Noting that in the last 10 years Bengaluru has grown the fastest among all major metros in the country, Kharge listed out the city's major milestones and said, "Your party may promote grand slogans like #MakeInIndia, #SkillIndia, #DigitalIndia, #AmritKaal, and #VikshitBharat, but without the contribution of my state, these slogans remain hollow." *—PTI*

WONDERS OF NATURE

A stunning rainbow formed in the fountain at Jayamahal Palace Park as the morning sun's rays passed through it, creating a picturesque sight in Bengaluru on Wednesday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

'Lokayukta probe doesn't deny MUDA irregularities'

BENGALURU, 26 FEB

Reacting to the Lokayukta Police giving a clean chit to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his wife in the MUDA scam, BJP leader Rajeev Chandrasekhar on Wednesday said that the investigation does not rule out irregularities in the land allotment.

"The MUDA scam and the Lokayukta's investigation does not say that it is not an irregular allotment. The Lokayukta only concluded that it was the fault of the officers to do something illegal," he said.

He further alleged that Siddaramaiah and his family benefited from illegal land allotment.

"The fact that Siddaramaiah and his family got land allocated to them illegally has been established...The sitting Chief Minister of Karnataka and his family have benefited from the land allotment is now not a secret,' he said. Accusing the Congress party of involvement in land scams, he added, "It is a widely known fact... The fact that Congress is in the business of land grabbing is now known. The Lokayukta has concluded that it is the fault of the officer. *—ANI*

Karnataka Urdu Academy announces annual awards

BENGALURU, 26 FEB

- Karnataka Urdu Academy has announced special prizes for eminent personalities who have rendered valuable services in the promotion of Urdu language and literature

The Karnataka Urdu Academy has announced its annual awards and special prizes to honour eminent personalities for their contributions to Urdu language and literature.

Annual awards are awarded to Ikram Naqash- Kalaburagi, Qalandar Rizvi alias Naalband- Hubballi, Shamim Nisa- Kolar, Mudassar Ahmed- Shivamogga, Anjuman Tarqi Urdu Hind Karnataka- Bengaluru, Mohammad Hanif Shabab- Bhatkal, Milnsar Athar Ahmed- Bengaluru, Syed Ahmed Abbas- Alipur, Chakbalapur, Syed Masood Ahmed Ghazanfar- Bengaluru, Federation of Karnataka Muslim Organizations- Chengari, Davangere. Special Awards are awarded to: North Karnataka Anjuman-e-Islam- Hubli, Qazi Aliuddin-Bidar, Nooruddin Noor Ghori- Kalbari, Bazm-e-Ghaleb- Bangalore, Khalil Ahmed- Davanagere, Syed Sameeruddin-Bengaluru, Jillaan-Chikkaballapur, Khwaja Moinuddin Bijapur- Hubbali, Syed Shahabuddin- Hassan, Yas Qadir Mohiuddin (Mahir Mansoor)-Bengaluru, Professor MA Hameed Akbar- Kulbargi, Muhammad Haseebullah-Tumakuru, Rizwan MK Nasheman weekly. Bengaluru, Naqwa Parvez- Udupi, Faizan-e-Urdu Adab- Mysore, Zubaida Begum- Bengaluru, Professor Yas M. Aqeel-Shivamoga, Sir Qazi Syed Qamaruddin (Sargarzasht-e-Kamil), Iqbal Ahmed Jakati-Belagavi, Zaheer Alam-Kolar, Muhammad Saeed-Bengaluru, Dawood Ali Jamshed- Chikkamagaluru, Muhammad Altaf Hussain- Davangere, Nematullah Khan- Mysuru, Abdul Aziz Dagh- Bengaluru. Prizes for books: Emotions of Mehroo - Mehro-Nisa Begum Mehroo, Asset of Literature - Syed Muhammad Hussain Dagh- Belgami - Syed Muhammad Hussain Dagh- Belgami, Naqd-e-Nazar - Dr. Syed Aleemullah Hossaini, Masnavi Phool-Ban - Khalida Begum, Chand Bahi Khawan-e-Bashr - Muhammad Hanif Bashar Bijapuri, Ek Tej Taghaful - Dr. Tahira Noorani, Naqsh-e-Tahrir - Wajid Akhtar Siddiqui, Tazkira Ulema and Mashaikhs of Karnataka - Habibullah Inayat Baig, Roshan Dariche - Waheed Anjum, Raka Sa Moosam - Farzana Farah. *—Salar News*

POCSO case filed against Mysuru school headmaster

MYSURU, 26 FEB

HD Kote Town police have registered a case under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act against the in-charge headmaster of a government higher primary school in Agasana Hundi, HD Kote taluk, for allegedly sexually harassing two minor students.

The case was registered based on a complaint lodged by HD Kote Block Education Officer (BEO) Kantharaj. The accused, H Girish, has been absconding since the case was filed.

Though the incident came to light on 19 February, there was a delay in registering the complaint and initiating action. Teachers, Cluster Resource Person HR Deepa, and others reported the matter to the BEO, but as the police had not yet received the complaint, no immediate action was taken. Frustrated by the inaction, villagers and parents of the victims staged a protest on Wednesday, locking the school doors.

Upon receiving information about the protest, HD Kote Circle Police Inspector Shabeer Hussein visited the village and, along with BEO Kantharaj, assured the villagers that action would be taken. Following their intervention, the protest was withdrawn, and the school was reopened for students.

Villagers alleged that the headmaster, who was transferred to the school six months ago, had been harassing students and demanded strict action against him. *—Salar News*

END OF FESTIVITIES

Lakh of devotees flock MM Hills for Maha Shivaratri

MYSURU, 26 FEB

A massive crowd of devotees thronged major Shiva temples, including the Trineshwara Temple at Mysuru Palace, the Srikanteshwara Temple in Nanjangud, and the Male Mahadeshwara Temple atop MM Hills, on Wednesday to celebrate Maha Shivaratri.

All Shiva temples were adorned with special floral decorations and illuminated from Tuesday evening in preparation for the grand celebrations. Devotees queued up from early morning until late night to offer special prayers at various temples in the city, including Amrutheshwara Swamy Temple (D Subbaiah Road), Sri Trineshwaraswamy Temple and Sri Kodi Bhyraveshwara Swamy Temple (Mysuru Palace premises), Sri Kameshwara Kameshwari Temple, 108 Linga Temple (Gurukula on Ramanuja Road), Sri Chandramouleshwara Swamy Temple (Vontikoppal), Sri Maruleshwara Swamy Temple (KG Koppal), Sri Mahadeshwara Temples (Bannur Road, Paduvarahalli, KT Street, Halladakeri, Sunnadakeri), and Sri Mahalingeshwara Swamy Temple (Srirampura), among others. Mysuru royal family scion Yaduveer Wadiyar, accompanied by his wife Trishikha Devi Wadiyar and their two sons, visited the Trineshwara Temple, where the deity was adorned with an 11-kg Chinnada Kolaga (gold mask). The 25th and last Maharaja of Mysuru, Jayachamaraja Wadiyar, had donated the Chinnada Kolaga to Sri Trineshwaraswamy Temple in 1952 as a fulfillment of his vow upon the birth of his son, Srikantadatta Narasimharaja Wadiyar. Similar Kolagas were also donated to the Nanjangud Srikanteshwara Swamy Temple and the Male Mahadeshwara Swamy Temple (MM Hills).

Atop Chamundi Hills, devotees flocked to the Chamundeshwari Temple, where all entry gates were opened.

Meanwhile, at T Narasipura thousands took dip at Triveni Sangama, the confluence of the Kaveri, Kapila, and Spatika Sarovara rivers. They also offered special prayers at Agastheswara Temple, Gunjanarasimhaswamy Temple. *— Salar News*

All Shiva temples were adorned with special floral decorations and illuminated from Tuesday evening in preparation for the grand celebrations **PHOTO: SALAR**

Kukis slam Manipur Guv's meeting with Meitei

IMPHAL, 26 FEB

Kuki Organisation for Human Rights (KOHUR) criticised Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla for meeting Meitei outfit Arambai Tenggol, calling it an armed extremist group responsible for mass violence. At the meeting on Tuesday, Bhalla sought Arambai Tenggol's cooperation in restoring peace and normalcy in the strife-torn state. The discussions also covered surrendering weapons under specific terms and conditions, officials said. It said the Kuki-Zo community will "not remain silent" while those responsible for their persecution are treated as political stakeholders. Following the meeting with Bhalla, Arambai Tenggol's PRO Robin Mangang said, "The governor requested us to give up arms. We have some terms and conditions and when those are fulfilled, we will surrender the weapons." —*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

KPCC's Sudhakaran says ready to quit if AICC wants

T'PURAM, 26 FEB

Amid reports that the Congress high command is planning a revamp of the party in Kerala from the top, KPCC president K Sudhakaran on Wednesday said he will abide by any decision taken by the All India Congress Committee. While making it clear that no one from the AICC has asked him to step down, he told reporters here that it is up to the high command to take a decision on reorganising the party and changing the KPCC president. "If they (AICC) ask me to step down, I will obey their command as a loyal and obedient party worker," he said. Media reports from Delhi have suggested that the AICC is planning to reorganise the state unit ahead of the local body elections this year and the assembly elections due in 2026.—*PTI*

Anvar says LDF attacked him; vows retaliation

MALAPPURAM, 26 FEB

PV Anvar, the state convener of the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC), said on Tuesday that some Left leaders were sending their party workers to attack him and UDF workers and warned them of retaliation. Anvar's remarks came in the wake of the UDF wresting control from the LDF in the Chungathara panchayat in the district on Tuesday. He has been trying to find a way into the UDF which has not yet accepted him into the fold despite his open support for it. In a video clipping of his speech aired on TV channels on Wednesday, the former MLA from Nilambur constituency alleged that Left leaders send party workers, by supplying them with alcohol and drugs, to attack him and UDF activists.—*PTI*

Punjabi dropped as class 10 subject dubbed conspiracy

CHANDIGARH, 26 FEB

Punjab Education Minister Harjot Singh Bains on Wednesday lashed out at the BJP-led Centre and the CBSE, accusing them of dropping Punjabi from the list of subjects for Class 10 and dubbed it as a "well-planned conspiracy" against Punjab, Punjabi and Punjabiyat. At the same time, the minister said that his department has issued a fresh notification stating that Punjabi will be a main subject in Class 10 in the state and if Punjabi is not a main subject in any school, then the certificate will be considered null and void. This will be implemented on all education boards in the state, he added. "It is a well-planned conspiracy against Punjab, Punjabi and Punjabiyat," he alleged. Bains hit out at the Punjab BJP for terming this issue as a "clerical mistake".—*PTI*

Nitish inducts seven new ministers, all from BJP

BJP prez Dilip Jaiswal quits over party's '1 person, 1 post' policy

PATNA, 26 FEB

With less than a year left for assembly polls, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Wednesday inducted seven new faces into his council of ministers, all from alliance partner BJP.

The expansion, which could be the last before the elections are announced, raises the total number of ministers to 36, the maximum permissible in the state with a 243-strong assembly.

Governor Arif Mohammad Khan administered the oath of office to the new ministers who all are members of the assembly. The state also has a legislative council.

The development took place on a day state BJP president Dilip Jaiswal, the former minister for revenue and landforms, gave up his cabinet berth citing the party's policy of "one person, one post".

The new ministers include Jibesh Kumar, who was a member of the state Cabinet till August 2022, when the chief minister abruptly quit the NDA, accusing the BJP of trying to "break" his JD(U).

Jibesh Kumar, who returns to the state cabinet with just two days left for the commencement of the budget session, told reporters: "I am ready to discharge the responsibility to the best of my ability".

Meanwhile, Bihar BJP president Dilip Jaiswal resigned from the Nitish Kumar cabinet on Wednesday morning to conform to his party's policy of one person, one post. Jaiswal held the crucial Revenue and Land Reform portfolio. He was inducted into the cabinet in January last year after the BJP returned to power in the state with CM Nitish Kumar joining the NDA.

"I am thankful to the party's leadership for entrusting me with major responsibilities. I shall now wholeheartedly devote myself to strengthening the party's organisation," he said. —*PTI*

Bihar Governor Arif Mohammed Khan being greeted by MLA Jibesh Kumar during the swearing-in ceremony of new members as Cabinet Ministers, in Patna PHOTO: PTI

- The expansion, which could be the last before the elections are announced, raises the total number of ministers to 36, the maximum permissible in the state with a 243-strong assembly

'FASCISM VS PAYASAM'

Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) chief and actor Vijay with Jan Suraaj chief Prashant Kishor during TVK's second anniversary celebrations, in Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu, on Wednesday PHOTO: PTI

BJP-DMK fight like KG kids: Vijay on language spat

CHENNAI, 26 FEB

Actor-politician Vijay, founder of Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK), on Wednesday ridiculed the BJP and DMK for waging a "hashtag war" on social media platform X and said the two parties were fighting like kindergarten kids, trivialising the serious issue of language row.

Meanwhile, in another key political development, actor Ranjana Natchiyaar joined the TVK on Wednesday. This comes a day after she quit the Bharatiya Janata Party – which she joined eight years ago – citing dissatisfaction with its policies, including the alleged imposition of Hindi.

Speaking at TVK's first anniversary celebrations at Mamallapuram near here Vijay said the BJP countered the DMK's "#Get out Modi" with "#Get out Stalin" on the trilingual policy, 'just like LKG and UKG students fight.'

"It's the Centre's duty to provide funds and it's the state's rights to receive funds. But our political and ideological enemies are playing (the politics of) fascism and payasam (the term TVK uses to ridicule DMK's anti fascism rhetoric) with hashtags on social media. What's happening here? Both are pretending to fight and expect us to believe? What bro, its wrong bro (sic)," he said.

He said the TVK respected all languages but would not give up its self respect for another language.

Jan Suraj Chief Prashant Kishor also attended the one-year anniversary celebration of the TVK on Wednesday. Kishor is an advisor to Vijay who is aiming to displace the two Dravidian Parties in the next assembly polls. —*PTI & ANI*

'Won't oppose Hindi if you don't impose'

Chennai, 26 FEB

The DMK will not oppose Hindi if it is not "imposed" on Tamil Nadu and forcing the language on Tamils amounts to playing with their self-respect, state Chief Minister M K Stalin said.

"For those asking why DMK still opposes Hindi, my humble response to them as one among you is--because you still impose it on us. Self-respect is Tamils' unique charecteristic and we will not allow anyone, to play with it." —*PTI*

Shah calls Stalin liar, says TN got ₹5L cr in 10 years

COIMBATORE, 26 FEB

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday denied any injustice to Tamil Nadu by the Centre as claimed by MK Stalin over fund allocation and described the Chief Minister raking up the delimitation issue as diversionary attempts.

While people are facing a number of issues, "the CM and his son (Udhayanidhi) have taken up some issue to divert public attention," Shah said.

Refuting Stalin's claims, Shah said the Narendra Modi government provided Rs 5,08,337 lakh crore to the state during the 2014–24 period.

Shah also accused Stalin of spreading a misinformation campaign on the delimitation exercise. Seeking to put to rest speculation on the subject, he asserted no southern state, including Tamil Nadu, would see a reduction in the Parliamentary representation when delimitation will be done on pro-rata basis.

Stalin had said the delimitation exercise would impact the southern states, especially Tamil Nadu, in the wake of successful implementation of the family planning programme. Claiming that Tamil Nadu stands to lose 8 out of the 39 Lok Sabha seats due to delimitation, he has convened an all-party meeting on 5 March to discuss the matter.

Speaking after inaugurating the BJP party office in Coimbatore, Shah, also lashed out at the ruling DMK dispensation for the "failure" of law and order in the state, saying, "anti-national tendency is at an all-time high". —*PTI*

Union Home Minister Amit Shah with Union MoS L Murugan and BJP leader K Annamalai during inauguration of BJP office, in Coimbatore PHOTO: PTI

JMM's Maji injured in car crash on way back from Kumbh

LATEHAR, 26 FEB

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha's MP Mahua Maji was injured while returning from Maha Kumbh after her car hit a truck parked on the roadside in Jharkhand's Latehar district in the early hours of Wednesday, police said.

Maji, a Rajya Sabha member, suffered a fracture in her left wrist and was admitted to a private hospital in Ranchi, they said. Her family members, who were in the car, also received minor injuries, they added.

The incident happened on NH-75 near Hotwag village around 2.30 am.

Maji was immediately taken to the Sadar Hospital where she was given first-aid and then referred to RIMS, Ranchi, for better treatment, said Sadar police station in-charge Dular Chowde. She was returning to Ranchi from Prayagraj along with her son and daughter-in-law. —*PTI*

AAP fields RS MP in bypoll; Oppn claims Kejri eyeing RS

CHANDIGARH, 26 FEB

AAP on Wednesday named Rajya Sabha member Sanjeev Arora as its candidate for the Ludhiana West assembly bypoll, drawing claims from opposition parties in Punjab that party supremo Arvind Kejriwal would enter the Upper House in his place.

Arora will have to resign from the Rajya Sabha if he wins the bypoll, the date for which is yet to be announced.

The passing of AAP's Gurpreet Bassi Gogi, who died of a gunshot injury after his licensed weapon accidentally discharged last month, led to the Ludhiana West seat falling vacant.

Kejriwal faced defeat from his New Delhi constituency as the BJP swept AAP in the Delhi Assembly polls earlier this month.

An AAP spokesperson, however, dismissed the opposition parties' claims.

Arora's name as the Ludhiana West bypoll candidate was announced by AAP national general secretary Sandeep Pathak in a post on X.

Sanjeev Arora PHOTO: ANI

Following the announcement, Congress MLA Sukhpal Singh Khaira claimed that Kejriwal would replace Arora in the Upper House.

Shiromani Akali Dal leader Bikram Singh Majithia also claimed that Kejriwal or former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia would replace Arora.

AAP's Punjab spokesperson Neel Garg, however, dubbed the claims as rumours.

"The bypoll date has not been announced yet. They (opposition parties) have started spreading rumours. There is no truth in it. Who goes to the Rajya Sabha will be decided when the bypoll result comes. The best candidate will be sent to the Rajya Sabha," Garg told reporters. —*PTI*

Cong seeks wider probe into 'liquor scam', targets BJP

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

Delhi unit of Congress on Wednesday called for the formation of the Public Accounts Committee soon so that the CAG report on the previous AAP government's excise policy can be investigated, and demanded that the scope of the probe be widened to include the alleged involvement of BJP leaders in the matter.

The opposition party also demanded that the remaining 13 Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) reports on the AAP government's performance be tabled as well and discussed in the public domain.

Addressing a press conference at the Congress' 24, Akbar Road headquarters, Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav said the party had given a written complaint to investigating agencies on the liquor policy and had included "evidence" of BJP's "involvement" in the matter.

Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit, also said the CAG report revealed that the objective of the liquor policy was changed repeatedly. —*PTI*

Sandeep Dikshit PHOTO: ANI

- The opposition party also demanded that the remaining 13 CAG reports on the AAP government's performance be tabled as well and discussed

Bisht to be named for Dy speaker today

New Delhi, 26 FEB

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta will propose the name of BJP MLA Mohan Singh Bisht for the post of deputy speaker of the Delhi Assembly on 27 February, the third day of the session. With no other contenders in the fray for the post. According to the list of business provided by the Delhi Assembly Speaker's office, two separate motions will be moved to elect Bisht to the post. Bisht, won the Mustafabad assembly. —*PTI*

Don't understand the issue: Tharoor on Cong's remarks

T'PURAM, 26 FEB

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor on Wednesday refuted the alleged controversy over his remarks in a podcast to an English daily, saying that it was a 45-minute conversation about life and nothing about political controversy.

"You all heard the podcast. What was the controversy about? I still haven't understood the controversy. Now that you have heard the whole podcast, can you tell me what your question is? I am happy to respond. It is a podcast, a 45-minute conversation about life and pursuits of happiness, nothing there much about any political controversy," Mr Tharoor told reporters.

He said that a party meeting has been scheduled for Friday, for which he will be present.

On Sunday, amidst reports that all is not well between him and the Congress following backlash from within the party on his apparent praise recently for Kerala LDF government's policy. —*ANI*

MP CALLS IT 'FISHING EXPEDITION'

CBI names 'Abhishek Banerjee' in job scam

KOLKATA, 26 FEB

The political circuit in West Bengal remained abuzz on Wednesday after it came to light that the CBI, in its recently submitted third supplementary charge sheet in the multi-crore cash-for-school job case, referred to an audio file of a recorded conversation from 2017 and named a certain Abhishek Banerjee who demanded Rs 15 crore for the illegal appointments.

The central agency, in the charge sheet, never clarified the identity of this Abhishek Banerjee, although the name bears exact resemblance to the name of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's nephew and Trinamool Congress national general secretary, against whom the state's political opposition has, in the past, repeatedly alleged involvement in the scam.

Later in the day, the MP's lawyer Sanjay Basu released a press statement and called the charge sheet submitted before a special CBI court claims "misleading and unsubstantiated" and branded it as "nothing more than a fishing expedition aimed at harassing my client."

Previously the ED had named TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee as the CEO of the company who had also remained one of its directors for a limited period.

Responding to the charge sheet claims, Banerjee, in his statement, alleged being "unjustly targeted by the agency". —*PTI*

TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee PHOTO: PTI

India successfully test fires naval anti-ship missile

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

India has successfully test fired a first-of-its-kind naval anti-ship missile from Chandipur off the coast of Odisha.

The trials carried out on Tuesday demonstrated the missile's capability against ship targets, ministry said.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh congratulated the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Indian Navy for successfully conducting the flight tests of the missile.

The DRDO and the Navy carried out successful flight-trials of first-of-its-kind Naval Anti-Ship missile (NASM-SR) from Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur, the ministry said.

"The trials demonstrated the missile's capability against ship targets while launched from an Indian Naval Seaking helicopter," the ministry said.

It said the "trials have proven the missile's Man-in-Loop feature and scored a direct hit on a small ship target in sea-skimming mode at its range."

The mission also has demonstrated the high bandwidth two way datalink system, which is used to transmit the seeker live images back to the pilot for in-flight retargeting.

The missile has been developed by different labs of DRDO including Research Centre Imarat, Defence Research and Development Laboratory, High Energy Materials Research Laboratory and Ballistics Research Laboratory. —*ANI*

PHOTO: ANI

Mumbai man sets kin on fire, dies due to burns

MUMBAI, 26 FEB

A 56-year-old man allegedly killed his mother-in-law by setting her on fire inside a tempo in Mumbai and then died himself due to the burn injuries. According to preliminary investigation, Krishna Daji Ashtankar, who struggled with alcohol addiction, suspected that his mother-in-law, aged 72, encouraged his wife to live with a patient as a caretaker. The victim's son said Ashtankar offered to take her to hospital in his tempo on Monday for an eye surgery. He then locked the tempo and beat the hapless woman with a heavy object before setting her on fire. He too was engulfed in flames. Both were taken to hospital after passer byes altered the police, where the doctors declared them dead on arrival. *—PTI*

Delhi airport's T2 to shut for 4 months from April

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

Delhi airport operator DIAL said Terminal 2 (T2) is expected to close for four to five months starting from April for upgradation. One of the runways will also be closed during this period. The works at T1 is expected to complete by 15 March and will open for flights after acquiring approvals. The capacity of around 15 million at T2 will be moved to T1 once construction at the former begins. The airport operator will also be converting a T3 section for international flights. Currently, this section is used for domestic operations. At present, T1 has an annual passenger's capacity of 40 million, T2 has 15 million and T3 has 34 million. The upgraded runway will allow flights to operate at low visibility. *—PTI*

Surat's textile market sees 2nd fire in 24 hrs

SURAT, 26 FEB

A massive fire broke out in a four-storey textile market in Surat city on Wednesday morning, for the second time in less than 24 hours. Although no casualty has been reported so far, several of the more than 800 shops located in the building were damaged. a fire department official said. While the exact cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained, prima facie it appears to have started on the top floor due to a short circuit. The President of the Federation of Surat Textile Traders Association Kailash Hakim said the situation was grave. Earlier on Tuesday afternoon, a fire broke out in the building's basement where textile stock was stored, leading to the death of a worker due to asphyxiation. *—PTI*

'Adulterated' 4,000 kg ghee seized in Gujurat

PALANPUR, 10 FEB

Kolewadi Authorities have seized 4,000 kg of suspected adulterated ghee valued at Rs 17.5 lakh from the premises of a firm selling dairy products in an industrial area in Gujarat's Banaskantha district. After investigation, it was suspected the ghee produced by the company was adulterated with soybean and interesterified vegetable fat, the Gujarat Food and Drugs Control Authority (FDCA) said in a statement. The estimated value of the seized material, weighing around 4,000 kg, was Rs 17.50 lakh, the FDCA said. The trading firm was in the past fined Rs 1.25 lakh for adulterating edible oil, and another Rs 25,000 in a criminal case for mixing colour in chillies, the FDCA said. The contaminated clarified butter was to be sent to neighbouring Rajasthan for sale during festivals. further legal action will be taken as per rules after receiving their segregation report. *—PTI*

Govt says T'gana tunnel rescue to conclude in 2 days

Project contracting firm says such accidents are 'expected'

NAGARKURNOOL, 26 FEB

Telangana Irrigation Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy said the rescue operation to extricate eight persons who remain trapped in the SLBC tunnel after it partially collapsed on Saturday, will be completed in two days with increased pace of action as it has been decided to go into the silt in search of the trapped men.

"The whole operation has been reviewed with all the officials, including from NDRF, Army, SDRF, District Collector, and superintendent of police. We have made a concrete plan of action today that we will go ahead into the silt. Now we are hoping that we can complete the whole operation in two days. We have decided a plan of action and decided a time frame, and now we will go forward," he said.

District Collector B Santhosh Santosh further said the National Geophysical Research Institute is expected to give their point of view on the stabilisation of soil and other issues, based on which the action plan would be drafted.

He added that the sniffer dogs will be used to locate the workers.

Telangana tunnel rescue operations PHOTO: PTI

The team which reached the exact accident site last night tried to communicate with the trapped persons but there was no response.

Jaiprakash Gaur, Founder Chairman of Jaypee Group, the contracting firm of the project said such accidents are expected.

- The rescue team attempted to communicate with the trapped workers from the accident site. but didn't receive a response

"In these difficult works, such things happen. In my life, I think there might be six or seven accidents, the Tehri (project), in Bhutan, in J&K, everywhere. You have to encounter all this," he said.

Earlier, the firm on 23 February had informed the stock exchanges that a day before the accident, 60 people including engineers, technicians, operators and Tunnel Boring Machine in-charge were working at the location.

The workers have been trapped for five days. *—PTI*

NEPALESE STUDENT'S DEATH

Odisha govt summons 4 more KIIT officials

BHUBANESWAR, 26 FEB

Expediting its inquiry, the Odisha government summoned four more KIIT officials to depose before the high-level committee probing the alleged death by suicide of a 20-year-old Nepalese BTech student and the subsequent unrest on the campus.

The Higher Education Department summoned the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology's (KIIT) chief proctor PK Patnaik, Director Sanhita Mishra, Internal Committee chief Ipsita Satpathy and Assistant Director Smarika Pati.

They were asked to appear before the panel headed by Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Satyabrata Sahu on 27 February.

Earlier, on 21 February, KIIT founder Achyuta Samanta and seven other top officials of the varsity had appeared before the panel and recorded their statements.

They were asked why notices asking students to leave the hostel were issued only to Nepalese students and why the institution failed to act on the harassment complaint filed by the deceased girl for over a month.

Samanta and others were also questioned about the alleged racial abuses directed at the Nepalese students, an official said.

The state government on 18 February constituted a high-level committee which has been mandated to ascertain the circumstances leading to the alleged suicide, and subsequent unrest in the institution.

KIIT has been witnessing unrest since 16 February after a student was found hanging in her hostel room. *—PTI*

Govt spent ₹400 cr in 10 yrs in court cases

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

PHOTO: PIXABAY

The government has spent more than Rs 400 crore to contest court cases during the past 10 years, official data showed. The central government's Rs 66 crore expenditure on litigations in the 2023-24 financial year was over Rs 9 crore higher than the previous fiscal.

The amount incurred on litigations has gone up since 2014-15, barring two fiscals when the Covid pandemic was at its peak, according to data shared by the government with during the ongoing Budget session in the Lok Sabha.

In 2014-15, the cost incurred on litigations stood at Rs 26.64 crore while the expenditure for 2015-16 was Rs 37.43 crore. Between the 2014-15 and the 2023-24 financial years, the government spent more than Rs 409 crore on litigations.

The government is working on a national litigation policy that seeks to expedite the resolution of pending cases. A draft of the proposed will go to the Union Cabinet for a final call. *—PTI*

SC stays order asking Centre to procure drugs for rare disorder

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

The Supreme Court has stayed in the interim a Kerala High Court order directing the Centre to provide an additional Rs 18 lakh worth of medicines to a patient suffering from spinal muscular atrophy, beyond its Rs 50 lakh cap.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar on 24 February issued notice to the respondents on Centre's plea.

"Issue notice returnable in the week commencing 17 April, 2025. till the next date of hearing, there will be a stay of the order of the impugned judgment."

Spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) is a rare genetic disorder characterised by progressive muscle weakness and wasting, affecting the nerve cells responsible for controlling voluntary muscle movement.

PHOTO: PTI

The high court on 6 February instructed that the SMA drug Risdiplam should be provided as a one-time measure to ensure continued treatment for 24-year-old Seba PA till the matter over its high pricing was addressed by a single-judge bench -- a process expected to take at least a month.

Seba's plea before the high court highlighted the exorbitant cost of Risdiplam, priced at Rs 6.2 lakh a bottle. Patients weighing up to 20 kilogram require one bottle a month whereas heavier patients may need up to three bottles, making long-term treatment financially unfeasible.

The Centre argued while the high court had clarified its ruling was not a binding precedent, granting individual exceptions could set one by default.

Under the policy, Centre can provide Rs 50 lakh for treatment. *—PTI*

Manipur police, IAS officers get new postings

IMPHAL, 26 FEB

The Manipur government transferred nine senior police officers and five IAS and forest service officers, according to official notifications.

Senapati district Superintendent of Police, Shivanand Surve, will take charge of SP of Thoubal district, while the police chief of Kakching Th Vikramjit Singh has been transferred as Commandant of 10th IRB, it said.

In a separate notification, the government also gave new postings to five IAS and Indian Forest Service officials with immediate effect.

The state is currently under President's Rule. *—PTI*

BJP BLAMES BANGLADESH

Several injured in clash over flag installation in J'khand

HAZARIBAG, 26 FEB

Several people were injured after two groups clashed over installation of flags during Maha Shivratri in Jharkhand's Hazaribag district.

It started when one group objected to the installation of religious flags and a loudspeaker in front of a school in Dumraon village.

A war of words escalated into violence, with both sides pelting bricks at each other. A number of two-wheelers were also set on fire, police said.

Senior police officers and security personnel went to the spot and used force to disperse the groups.

The situation is tense but under control, police said. "We appeal to people to celebrate Maha Shivratri peacefully," a police official said.

Reacting to the incident, Ranchi MP Sanjay Seth blamed Bangladeshi infiltrators for the violence and urged Chief Minister Hemant Soren to initiate stringent measures.

"Whether it is Holi, Saraswati Puja, Ramnavmi or Maha Shivratri, why do such incidents recur only in Jharkhand? It is because infiltrators from Bangladesh are hell-bent on destroying communal harmony and law and order and changing the state's demography," he alleged.

A vehicle set on fire by miscreants after a violent clash broke out between two communities, in Hazaribagh, Jharkhand PHOTO: PTI

"Such incidents rarely occur in states ruled by BJP-NDA whether Delhi, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, or Uttar Pradesh." he added.

Demanding strict action against the perpetrators, Seth said, "I urged the CM to strengthen law and order here. The state government should identify the Bangladeshi infiltrators and drive them out." *—PTI*

Man held for selling patient's CCTV videos

AHMEDABAD, 26 FEB

Gujarat Police has arrested one more person in connection with the alleged hacking of a hospital's CCTV network to obtain videos of women patients for online sale.

The arrest of Rohit Sisodia, a Delhi resident, took the tally of those held so far to seven.

Sisodia allegedly converted hacked CCTV footage into QR codes and sold them to the co-accused who then shared the videos through YouTube and Telegram channels, Ahmedabad Cyber Crime Branch said in a release.

The Cyber Crime Branch on 17 February registered a case after videos of women patients being examined by doctors inside the labour room of a hospital were circulated online.

The police arrested six persons including a hacker named Parit Dhamelia from Surat and owner of a YouTube channel Prajwal Taily, a resident of Latur, Maharashtra. Dhamelia, a commerce graduate, had allegedly hacked into the CCTV system of a maternity home in Rajkot and shared videos with Sisodia. *—PTI*

Made a mistake: BeerBiceps tells cops

MUMBAI, 26 FEB

PHOTO: X

- Allahbadia admitted he made a mistake by making the remark in the now controversial show 'India's got Latent,' in his statement to Maharashtra Cyber police

Podcaster Ranveer Allahbadia, whose remarks on a YouTube show kicked up a row, has said he committed a "mistake in his statement before the Maharashtra Cyber.

The Maharashtra Cyber and the Mumbai police are investigating Allahbadia's controversial remarks made on comedian Samay Raina's YouTube show "India's Got Latent".

Allahbadia made crude comments about parents and sex, leading to widespread backlash and multiple FIRs.

On Monday, Allahbadia and Ashish Chanchlani, also a YouTuber, appeared separately before the Maharashtra Cyber to record their statements in the case of obscenity, an official said.

"In his statement, Allahbadia admitted that he made a mistake by making the controversial comments," the official said.

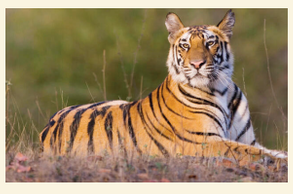
Allahbadia also told the officials that Samay Raina was his friend and he had gone to the show only for the latter, the official said, adding that Allahbadia also claimed he did not charge anything to attend the show.

The Maharashtra Cyber also recorded the statement of social media influencer Apoorva Makhija on Tuesday in connection with the "India's Got Latent" controversy. Makhija is among the persons named in the obscenity case registered with the Maharashtra Cyber.

The authorities have also summoned actor Rakhi Sawant on 27 February, who had appeared in the show as a guest, the official said. *—PTI*

Tigress attacks villagers in UP, beaten to death

LAKHIMPUR KHERI, 26 FEB



In a devastating incident, a two-year-old tigress was brutally killed by villagers in Phulwaria, Lakhimpur Kheri district, Uttar Pradesh, on February 26, 2025. The tigress had wandered into the village from the nearby Dudhwa Tiger Reserve and attacked two residents, sparking panic among the locals.

In a shocking turn of events, the villagers surrounded the tigress and beat it to death with sticks. Forest officials arrived at the scene while the tigress was still alive, but the agitated crowd prevented them from intervening in time to save the animal.

A case has been registered under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, and an investigation is currently underway. The injured villagers are receiving medical treatment and are reported to be in stable condition.

This tragic incident highlights the growing human-wildlife conflict in the region. An investigation is underway, and the injured woman is undergoing treatment. The villagers claim they acted in self-defense. *—PTI*

AMID NEP DEBATE

Telangana mandates Telugu in all schools

HYDERABAD, 26 FEB

The Telangana government issued orders for making Telugu a compulsory subject for students of 1st to 10th classes in CBSE, ICSE, IB and other boards affiliated schools in the state from the 2025-26 academic year.

The order follows the Telangana (Compulsory Teaching and Learning of Telugu in Schools) Act of 2018, which aimed to enforce Telugu education across government, Zilla Parishad, Mandal Parishad, aided, and board-affiliated schools.

As majority of schools in Telangana are government schools, Telugu is typically the primary mode of instruction and learning. However, schools that come under non-state boards have largely not been teaching Telugu, according to media reports.

The new 'Vennela' textbook aims to make it easier for students from other linguistic backgrounds PHOTO: PTI

The Congress government took the step after the proposal was discussed in a high-level meeting at the Ministry of Education, chaired by the Union Minister of Education.

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Tuesday decided to use the 'Simple Telugu' textbook 'Vennela', making it easier for class 9th and 10th students from other linguistic backgrounds, including those who have migrated from different states, the state said.

The government ordered that Telugu be taught compulsorily from the 2025-26 academic year for Classes 1 to 10 in schools under CBSE, ICSE, IB and other boards, the state said.

In 2026, about 26.60 lakh Class X students and 20 lakh Class XII students are expected to take the exams.

The decision comes shortly after national level rows over the NEP's three language policy.

Notably Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin criticised the police and called the policy 'Hindi imposition'.*—Agencies*

THE HAMMER STRIKES

A carnival float depicts Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy using a love hammer on Russia's President Vladimir Putin at the presentation of this year's satirical carnival floats in Cologne, Germany
PHOTO: PTI

Tesla eyes India's EV market but hurdles remain

US electric vehicle manufacturer Tesla began hiring in India last week, with the company advertising a dozen job openings on its website, including for a store manager and service technicians in both the capital, New Delhi, and economic hub, Mumbai.

The company's announcement comes after its CEO, Elon Musk, held a one-on-one meeting with Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, in Washington.

Tesla has been mulling entry into the world's most populous nation for several years, with media reports last year suggesting it was scouting for factory and showroom locations.

India's electric car market remains small — a growth opportunity for Tesla as it struggles with the competition from Chinese EV rivals and seeing its first slump in annual EV sales.

The company's announcement comes after its CEO Elon Musk held a one-on-one meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in Washington on 12 February. ***PHOTO: PTI***

A key and promising market

India has the world's third-largest automotive market by volume. And Modi's government has big plans for battery-powered vehicles: They want electric cars to account for 30 per cent of the country's new car sales by 2030.

India could also serve as a car export hub for the region.

Still, significant challenges remain, said Shubham Mishra, founder and CEO of Battery Ok Technologies. His company specializes in advanced battery diagnostics for the EV sector.

"Tesla's current pricing — starting at approximately $40,000 for the Model 3 — far exceeds the affordability threshold of the Indian market, where 80 per cent of cars sold are priced below $15,000," he told DW.

"Developing a cost-competitive model, potentially under $30,000, will be essential, with an unwavering focus on maintaining battery quality to withstand India's extreme climates, including temperatures exceeding 40 degrees Celsius," he added.

Mishra also said that entrenched local competitors like Tata Motors — which commands 70% of India's EV market — pose a formidable threat, while the country's challenging road conditions demand enhanced vehicle durability.

Incentives and challenges for EV makers

India has long had high import taxes for electric vehicles, preventing Tesla from entering the market even in the absence of local manufacturing.

Last year, however, India rolled out a program to promote the manufacturing of electric vehicles in the country. The policy slashed import duties on e-cars for global automakers that committed to invest $500 million and start local production within three years.

The move is seen as offering an incentive for Tesla to set up a local plant.

The policy, however, applies to all EV makers. Vietnamese automaker VinFast has already announced plans this year to spend up to $2 billion on building an electric vehicle factory in India.

Even with these ambitious plans, the country's charging infrastructure remains a critical bottleneck.

The EV charging network in India has grown in recent years, rising from 1,800 public charging stations in early 2022 to over 16,000 by mid-2024.

But the growth falls short of what's needed for a rapid adoption of electric mobility. Furthermore, fast charger installations and grid upgrades are expensive, deterring widespread deployment.

"This is a major and significant issue for the EV segment and Tesla has already identified these problems and hopes to work to address them by laying the groundwork for their supercharging network," Shrijay Sheth, founder of Legalwiz.in, a top legal-tech startup told DW.

"Hopefully, Tesla's entry into India may prove to be the proverbial catalyst that energizes the sector with much-needed impetus," he added.

A win-win situation?

Dilip Chenoy, former director general of the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers, shares a similar view, saying that Tesla's entry could accelerate EV adoption in India by bringing in cutting-edge technology, increasing consumer choice and spurring competition.

"Though challenges remain in pricing vehicles competitively for Indian consumers, meeting localization requirements, and rolling out charging infrastructure, there are other positives," Chenoy told DW.

"This is a win-win for both Tesla and India. For Tesla, it provides a growing market and a new production base less constrained by tariffs. For India, it brings FDI, technology access, and a strengthened EV ecosystem, offering consumers more choice," he stressed.

—DW News

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR ساڈھ

Trump, Musk rule like kings, following the Putin model

Dictatorships would appear to be on the rise. Russian President Vladimir Putin, US President Donald Trump and even un-elected tech entrepreneur, Elon Musk are ruling by decree like "kings".

Some might naively call these leaders "authentic" for saying and often doing what they believe. But that's not the whole story.

Such unilateral decisions are deeply divisive, and often opposed. In the US, the federal court blocked Trump's executive order banning workplace diversity, equity and inclusion programmes to try to contain the damage.

Researchers used to think that authenticity was inherently good and moral. But as authentic leadership research gets more sophisticated with robust experimental methods, what we know about this powerful approach is changing quickly.

Experiments use controlled simulations and real-world field trials to show how leadership behaviour influences followers. These new methods are the gold standard for establishing cause-and-effect relationships, and they're challenging old ideas.

Authentic leadership redefined

After 20 years of research, we've redefined authentic leadership as a process of sending leadership "signals". What leaders say and do sends powerful messages about their values.

In a digital age where every tweet and public act is scrutinised, understanding these signals is important for employees and voters. And keeping up with this new way of expressing authentic leadership is vital for anyone seeking to lead in today's volatile world.

In our latest article, we looked at what authentic leadership involves and why signalling is so important.

But what exactly is "signalling"?

Sending leadership 'signals'

Everything leaders do or say – how they behave, express themselves, look, and communicate – sends messages to everyone watching. These messages are "signals".

Leaders influence their followers by sending signals that will trigger specific thoughts or emotions.

But executive life is complex and full of inherent contradictions between personal authenticity and the demands of leadership roles.

High-profile figures such as Musk and Trump show how leadership signals can be polarising. Just last week Musk used his social media platform X (formerly Twitter) to call for an unconstitutional election in Ukraine.

Signalling authentic leadership

Demonstrating authentic leadership depends on sending clear, observable signals that reflect the leaders' principles and ethical convictions. Here are some tips for spotting authentic leadership signals in everyday interactions. It is notable that it's easier to find examples of leaders displaying the complete opposite.

1. Self-awareness

Leaders signal self-awareness by regularly seeking honest feedback and reflecting on their own strengths and weaknesses. They openly acknowledge mistakes and share their learning. They value personal growth and continuous improvement. Instead, Trump repeatedly ignores his own mistakes, even after they are exposed. His latest claim to be debunked was that Ukrainian President Zelenskyy's approval was 4 per cent, while his actual approval is closer to 60 per cent.

2. Internal moral perspective

Leaders signal an internal moral perspective by making decisions – even if they are unpopular – firmly rooted in core ethical values. Upholding these values and encouraging open discussions on ethics is a principled approach to leadership.

Instead, Musk has given federal workers 48 hours to justify their employment. The directive leaves little room for open dialogue on the ethical rationale or moral implications of such a drastic measure.

He relies, instead, on top-down command.

Key federal agencies including the FBI and Pentagon have told employees to ignore the email.

3. Balanced processing

Leaders signal balanced processing by seeking different views and considering all options before making a decision. Admitting any biases and using team brainstorming or surveys, ensures fair and informed decision-making.

Instead, Trump has signed more than 50 executive orders since taking office in January.

These include some that are unlawful, as an open display of personal bias and unilateral decision-making.

4. Relational transparency

Leaders signal relational transparency by sharing appropriate personal experiences and vulnerabilities with their teams.

Being honest about limitations and inviting open dialogue builds trust through genuine and consistent communication.

Instead social media guru, Mark Zuckerberg, another Trump ally, assured staff his charity the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative would continue its commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.

Then, only weeks later, he dismantled it. *—PTI*

Russian President Vladimir Putin, US President Donald Trump and even tech entrepreneur Elon Musk are ruling by decree like 'kings' ***PHOTO: PTI***

Fragile ceasefire in Gaza faces key deadline. Will it last?

The first phase of the ceasefire that paused 15 months of brutal warfare between Israel and Hamas militants is set to end on Saturday — and it's unclear what comes next.

The two sides were supposed to start negotiating a second phase weeks ago in which Hamas would release all the remaining hostages in exchange for more Palestinian prisoners, a lasting ceasefire and a full Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

But those negotiations have not begun — there have only been preparatory talks — and the first phase has been jolted by one dispute after another.

Hamas has freed all 25 living hostages included in the first six-week phase ending on March 1 in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners. It has also released the bodies of four captives and is expected to turn over four more, though it's unclear if that will happen Thursday as planned.

That leaves it with more than 60 captives, around half of whom are believed to be dead. Israel has meanwhile delayed the release of some 600 Palestinian prisoners who were supposed to be freed last weekend over the treatment of the captives, who were paraded before crowds.

Israel is reportedly seeking an extension of the first phase to secure the freedom of more captives. But Hamas says it won't negotiate anything until the prisoners whose release was delayed are freed.

Negotiations over Phase 2 will be even more contentious.

Phase 2 was always the biggest challenge

The second phase was always going to be the most difficult because it would likely force Israel to choose between its two main war goals — the safe return of the hostages and the annihilation of their captors.

Hamas, though weakened, remains in power with no internal challengers. In exchange for the remaining living hostages — its main bargaining chip — it is demanding a lasting ceasefire and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces.

A third phase would see the exchange of remains and the start of Gaza's daunting reconstruction process, which is expected to take years and cost billions of dollars.

Steve Witkoff, the Trump administration's Mideast envoy, is returning to the region this week. In an interview with CNN's "State of the Union" on Sunday, he said he will aim for an extension of Phase 1 to buy time for negotiating the second phase.

But Egypt, which has served as a key mediator, has refused to discuss an extension of Phase 1 until negotiations over Phase 2 begin, according to two Egyptian officials who were not authorised to brief reporters and spoke on condition of anonymity. One official familiar with the negotiations said the mere launch of Phase 2 talks would keep the truce intact, according to the language of the deal. That would mean a continued halt in fighting and aid flowing into Gaza, though there would be no further hostage releases beyond what has already been negotiated, he said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss closed diplomatic contacts.

Israeli hostages are escorted by Hamas fighters before being handed over to the Red Cross in Rafa, Gaza ***PHOTO: PTI***

Hamas has previously said it is open to a short extension to complete talks on Phase 2, but that was before Israel held up the release of the prisoners.

One of the Egyptian officials said Egypt is also demanding Israel complete its withdrawal from the Philadelphi corridor, on the Gaza side of the border with Egypt, before moving on to the next phase. The agreement calls for that withdrawal to begin this weekend and be completed within eight days.

Netanyahu has not publicly stated what he will do this weekend. He is under heavy pressure from hard-line coalition partners to resume the war against Hamas. But after images showed freed hostages returning home in poor condition, he also faces heavy public pressure to bring the remaining hostages home.

Witkoff said Netanyahu is committed to bringing back all the hostages but has set a "red line" that Hamas cannot be involved in governing Gaza after the war. Netanyahu has also ruled out any role in Gaza for the Western-backed Palestinian Authority, dominated by Hamas' main rival, Fatah.

Hamas has said it is willing to hand over control of Gaza to other Palestinians.

But the militant group, which does not accept Israel's existence, would still be deeply entrenched in Gaza. And it says it won't lay down its arms unless Israel ends its occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem, lands captured in the 1967 Mideast war that Palestinians want for a future state. Hamas has also dismissed Israel's suggestion that its Gaza leadership go into exile.

Phase 1 is unfinished and has further embittered both sides

The first phase of the ceasefire has yet to be completed and has only deepened the bitter mistrust on both sides.

Israelis were shocked to see the captives — some of whom were emaciated — paraded before crowds upon their release, with some forced to smile, wave, deliver statements and, in one case, kiss a masked militant on the head. After returning to Israel, hostages said they were held under harsh conditions. Last Thursday, Hamas displayed coffins holding what it said were the remains of Shiri Bibas and her two small children, who it said were killed in an Israeli airstrike. Israel said a forensic investigation showed the two children were killed by their captors. The third body turned out to be someone else. Hamas then released another body that was confirmed to be the mother.

On Saturday, Hamas filmed two hostages who were forced to watch the release of others, turning to a camera and begging to be released, in yet another public spectacle that infuriated Israel. That appears to have prompted Israel to postpone the release of the prisoners.

Hamas has accused Israel of violating the ceasefire by killing dozens of people who the army said had approached its forces or entered unauthorised areas. It also accused Israel of dragging its feet on the entry of mobile homes and equipment for clearing rubble, which entered late last week, and of beating and abusing Palestinian prisoners prior to their release.

Israel has also launched a major military operation in the occupied West Bank that has displaced some 40,000 Palestinians, according to the United Nations. Israel says it is cracking down on militants who threaten its citizens, while Palestinians see it as trying to further cement its decades-long rule. *—PTI*

Over 100 US intel officers fired for raunchy chats

WASHINGTON DC, 26 FEB

Tulsi Gabbard, director of US National Intelligence, announced the termination of more than 100 intelligence officers over their involvement in sexually explicit conversations on the National Security Agency's (NSA) 'Interlink' messaging platform. The officers would also have their security clearances revoked, she told Fox News. The chat platform was meant for classified discussions but was misused for explicit conversations, including discussions on gender transition surgery, according to intelligence officials. Gabbard said the officers were "brazen in using an NSA platform intended for professional use to conduct this kind of really, really horrific behaviour". *—Agencies*

PHOTO: ANI

Argentines in Rome pray for Pope's recovery

ROME, 26 FEB

Pope Francis continued to be in critical condition and resting on Wednesday, as Argentines and Romans alike gathered in the Eternal City to pray for his recovery from double pneumonia. The Vatican's short morning update said, "The pope had a peaceful night and is resting." On Tuesday night, the faithful from Francis' homeland gathered in the Argentine church of Rome for a special Mass presided over by Cardinal Baldassarre Reina, the pope's vicar for Rome. The rector of the church, Rev. Fernando Laguna, said he hoped the pope could feel the embrace of the community's prayer from the Gemelli hospital where he is recovering. "I can't go to Gemelli, because for him to recover he must be isolated," he said. *—PTI*

Sydney nurse in trouble for video against Israelis

SYDNEY, 26 FEB

A Sydney nurse has been charged with making threats after she appeared in an online video, saying she would not treat Israeli patients. Sarah Abu Lebdeh, 26, was arrested on Tuesday night and charged with the federal offenses of threatening violence to a group, using a carriage service to threaten to kill and using a carriage service to menace and harass, police said in a statement. The charges carried a potential maximum penalty of 22 years in prison. Neither a defense lawyer nor Abu Lebdeh has commented on the charges. She was released on bail to appear in a Sydney court on 19 March. The hospital examined patient records and found no evidence that the nurse had harmed any patient. *—PTI*

Chile declares state of emergency amid power outage

SANTIAGO, 26 FEB

Chile has declared a state of emergency after a massive power outage left millions in the South American country without electricity and plunged capital Santiago into darkness. Tuesday's blackout, the country's largest in years, was caused by a high-voltage transmission line failure in Chile's north, Interior Minister Carolina Toha said, ruling out sabotage. Speaking in a late-night television address to the nation, Chilean President Gabriel Boric said eight million homes had been affected by the outage, which he blamed on private firms. "What happened today is outrageous because it's not tolerable that one or several companies impact the everyday life of millions of Chileans, and that's why it's the state's duty to hold them responsible," Boric said. Chile's national disaster response service, Senapred, said 14 of the country's 16 regions were affected. *—Agencies*

Trump opens $5M route to US citizenship

US Prez moots a 'more sophisticated' Gold Card to replace the Green Card; likely in 2 weeks

WASHINGTON, 26 FEB

President Donald Trump said Tuesday that he plans to offer a "Gold Card" visa with a path to citizenship for USD5M, replacing the Green Card, a 35-year-old visa for investors. It is expected to come into effect in two weeks.

"They'll be wealthy and they'll be successful, and they'll be spending a lot of money and paying a lot of taxes and employing a lot of people, and we think it's going to be extremely successful," Trump said in the Oval Office.

Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said the "Trump Gold Card" would replace EB-5 visas in two weeks. EB-5s were created by Congress in 1990 to generate foreign investment and are available to people who spend about USD1M on a company that employs at least 10 people.

Lutnick said the Gold Card – actually a Green Card, or permanent legal residency – would raise the price of admission for investors and do away with fraud and "nonsense" that he said characterise the EB-5 programme. Like other Green Cards, it would include a path to citizenship.

About 8,000 people obtained investor visas in the 12-month period ending 30 September, 2022, according to the Homeland Security Department's most recent Yearbook of Immigration Statistics. The Congressional Research Service reported in 2021 that EB-5 visas pose risks of fraud, including verification that funds were obtained legally.

Trump made no mention of the requirements for job creation. And, while the number of EB-5 visas is capped, Trump mused that the federal government could sell 10M "Gold Cards" to reduce the deficit.

"It's somewhat like a Green Card, but at a higher level of sophistication, it's a road to citizenship for people, and essentially people of wealth or people of great talent, where people of wealth pay for those people of talent to get in, meaning companies will pay for people to get in and to have long, long term status in the country," he said. *—PTI*

A scene from an AI video shared by President Donald Trump shows the transformation of Gaza Strip from rubbles to a tourist destination. The video featuring 'Trump's Gaza' also shows children looking at the sky as dollar bills rain down and his Key ally Elon Musk eating hummus on the beach **PHOTO: INSTA/@ REALDONALDTRUMP**

Amy Gleason named acting leader of DOGE

WASHINGTON DC, 26 FEB

Amy Gleason **PHOTO: X**

Amy Gleason has been named the acting administrator of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). Gleason is a low-profile executive who has expertise in healthcare technology and worked in the first Trump administration.

The identity of who was technically running DOGE had been a mystery, even though an executive order signed by Trump last month called for the appointment of an administrator to report to the White House.

Gleason, 53, worked from 2018 through 2021 in the United States Digital Service, an agency that has been renamed the US DOGE Service, according to her LinkedIn profile. In that role, she worked with the White House on the federal response to the coronavirus pandemic.

She returned to the agency in January after Trump took office.

In the interim, she had been working as "chief product officer" at two small Nashville-based health care startups, Russell Street Ventures and Main Street Health, according to her LinkedIn profile.

Gleason has long been an advocate to cure a condition called juvenile myositis, a rare autoimmune disease that can cause muscle weakness and a skin rash in children.

She worked as vice president for research at the Cure JM Foundation from 2014 to 2018, according to her LinkedIn profile. *—PTI*

> The identity of who was technically running DOGE had been a mystery, even though an executive order last month called for the appointment of an administrator to report to the White House

Teachers challenge Trump order

A new federal lawsuit in Maryland is challenging a Trump administration memo giving the nation's schools and universities two weeks to eliminate "race-based" practices of any kind or risk losing their federal money. The lawsuit by teachers' union says the Education Department's 14 memo violates the First and Fifth Amendments. *—PTI*

WH to pick journos for Trump coverage

The White House said that its officials "will determine" which news outlets can regularly cover President Donald Trump up close — a sharp break from tradition in which a pool of independently chosen news organizations go where the chief executive does and hold him accountable on behalf of regular Americans. But media experts said the move raised troubling First Amendment issues. *—PTI*

Musk says Democrats want him dead

Billionaire and President Trump's key ally Elon Musk has alleged that Democrats want to take his life over exposing financial mismanagement in the US through DOGE. Musk's latest remarks came in response to a post on social media, where a user highlighted that Musk is not seeking personal gain but is exposing those responsible for misusing taxpayer funds. *—Agencies*

Volodymyr Zelenskyy is likely to meet Donald Trump in Washington and sign the deal as early as Friday **PHOTO: X**

US, Ukraine near economic deal on minerals: Officials

KYIV, 26 FEB

Ukraine and the US have reached an agreement on a framework for a broad economic deal that would include access to Ukraine's rare earth minerals, senior Ukrainian officials said on Tuesday.

One of them said that Kyiv hopes that signing the agreement will ensure the continued flow of US military support that Ukraine urgently needs.

The agreement could be signed as early as Friday, and plans are being drawn up for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to travel to Washington to meet President Donald Trump, one of the officials said.

Another official said the agreement would provide an opportunity for Zelenskyy and Trump to discuss continued military aid to Ukraine, which is why Kyiv is eager to finalise the deal.

According to one official, some the draft does not include a contentious Trump administration proposal to give the US USD 500B worth of profits from Ukraine's rare earth minerals as compensation for its wartime assistance to Kyiv. Instead, the US and Ukraine would have joint ownership of a fund, and Ukraine would in the future contribute 50 per cent of future proceeds from state-owned resources, including minerals, oil, and gas. *—PTI*

UNSTABLE TRUCE

Hamas to trade 4 bodies for hundreds of captives

CAIRO, 26 FEB

Hamas will return the bodies of four Israeli hostages on Thursday in exchange for Israel's release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, the group said, just days before the first phase of the ceasefire between the warring parties was to expire.

Israel has delayed the release of some 600 Palestinian prisoners since Saturday to protest what it says is the cruel treatment of hostages during their release by Hamas.

The militant group has said the delay is a "serious violation" of their ceasefire and that talks on a second phase are not possible until the Palestinians are freed.

Hamas spokesman Abdul Latif al-Qanou told AP on Wednesday that Hamas would hand over the bodies of four Israelis the next day.

In exchange, Israel would release the Palestinian prisoners, as well as an unspecified number of women and minors detained since the militant group's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel that sparked the conflict.

An Israeli official confirmed that the bodies of four hostages were expected to be turned over but provided no further details. Israel and Hamas had already said on Tuesday that an agreement had been reached to return the bodies of the hostages, but no date had been announced. *—PTI*

Mourners gather around a convoy carrying the coffins of slain hostages Shiri Bibas and her two children during their funeral procession in Rishon Lezion on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Israel targets command units, arms stash in Syria

The says it IDF is on watch along the Syrian border to ensure the safety and security of Israeli residents **PHOTO: PTI**

TEL AVIV, 26 FEB

The Israeli Defence Forces struck military targets, including command centres and weapon storage sites, inside Southern Syria along with weapon storage sites in the past few hours, the IDF posted on X on Wednesday morning.

Stating that the presence of military forces and assets in south Syria poses a threat to civilians, the IDF said it would continue its operations to "remove any threat to Israelis".

"The IDF struck military targets in southern Syria, including command centers and multiple sites containing weapons, over the past few hours. The presence of military forces and assets in the southern part of Syria poses a threat to Israeli civilians. The IDF will continue to operate in order to remove any threat to Israelis."

The IDF has been routinely working along the Syrian border to "ensure the safety and security of Israeli residents".

In January, the IDF confiscated over 3,300 weapons from Syrian territory. It said on X, "Over 3,300 weapons have been confiscated from Syrian territory so far. Our troops continue their mission of frontline defense in Syria to ensure the safety and security of Israeli residents. Syrian Armed Forces tanks, anti-tank missiles, RPGs, mortars and observation equipment were confiscated." *—PTI*

CODE BREACH

Microsoft throws out staffers from meet for opposing services to Israel

WASHINGTON, 26 FEB

PHOTO: X

Five Microsoft employees were ejected from a meeting with the company's chief executive for protesting contracts to provide Artificial Intelligence and cloud computing services to the Israeli military.

The protest on Monday came after an investigation by The Associated Press revealed last week that sophisticated AI models from Microsoft and OpenAI had been used as part of an Israeli military programme to select bombing targets during the recent wars in Gaza and Lebanon.

The story also contained details of an errant Israeli airstrike in 2023 that struck a vehicle carrying members of a Lebanese family, killing three girls and their grandmother.

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella was speaking about new products at an employee town hall meeting at the company's corporate campus in Redmond, Washington. Workers standing about 15 feet to his right then revealed T-shirts that when they stood side-by-side spelled out the question "Does Our Code Kill Kids, Satya?"

Photos and video of the incident, which was live streamed throughout the company, shows Nadella kept speaking and did not acknowledge the protesters. Two men quickly tapped the workers on the shoulders and ushered them out of the room.

"We provide many avenues for all voices to be heard," Microsoft told the AP. "Importantly, we ask that this be done in a way that does not cause a business disruption. If that happens, we ask participants to relocate. We are committed to ensuring our business practices uphold the highest standards."

Microsoft did not answer Tuesday when asked whether the employees involved in the protest would face disciplinary action. *—PTI*

Toll in Sudan military plane crash rises to 46

The Antonov aircraft crashed on Tuesday while taking off from the Wadi Sayidna air base north of Omdurman **PHOTO: X**

CAIRO, 26 FEB

The death toll from a Sudanese military plane crash in the city of Omdurman increased to at least 46 people, officials said Wednesday. The crash also injured 10 others.

The Antonov aircraft crashed on Tuesday while taking off from the Wadi Sayidna air base north of Omdurman, the military said in a statement. Omdurman is the sister city of the capital, Khartoum.

The military said that armed forces personnel and civilians were killed in the crash. It didn't say what caused the crash.

The ministry said that the aircraft crashed over a civilian house in the Karrari district in Omdurman, suggesting that there were people dead on the ground. *—PTI*

Tourist bus falls into ditch in Thailand; 18 killed

BANGKOK, 26 FEB

At least 18 people have been killed and 23 injured in eastern Thailand after a tour bus rolled upside down into a ditch, police said.

"It was a downhill road and the brakes failed, and the driver lost control of the vehicle before it overturned," said Colonel Sophon Phramaneehe, adding that those who died on Wednesday were adults on a study trip.

Social media posts showed rescue and medical workers at the scene in Prachinburi province, 155km east of the capital, Bangkok, helping victims near the bus with its undercarriage exposed.

Local official Somjai Phutthasena said about 20 injured passengers were taken to hospital, warning that some remained in critical condition. *—Agencies*

INDIA SIGNS 13 FTAs & 6 PACTS WITH UK

India-UK negotiations are resuming after a gap of over 8 months; 14 rounds of talks completed

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

India has signed 13 free trade agreements (FTAs) and six preferential pacts with its trading partners to promote exports of goods and services, besides ensuring greater market access for the domestic industry.

Since 2014, the country has signed 3 such agreements with Mauritius, the UAE and Australia, and EFTA (European Free Trade Association).

India is actively negotiating similar pacts with UK and EU.

On 24 February, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade Jonathan Reynolds announced resumption of negotiations for the proposed FTA between two countries.

The India-UK negotiations are resuming after a gap of over 8 months. The talks were launched on 13 January, 2022. So far 14 rounds of talks have been completed.

What is an FTA?

A free trade agreement is a pact between 2 or more countries to eliminate or reduce import duties on a maximum number (90-95 per cent) of goods traded between them. It also aims to minimize non-trade barriers on a significant portion of imports from partner nations while easing regulations to boost service exports and investments.

What are the different types of trade agreements ?

FTAs are sometimes referred to by different names depending on their scope and depth of economic cooperation. These include PTA (preferential) or RTA (regional), or BTA (bilateral). WTO uses the abbreviation RTA to denote all types of such economic engagements. In a PTA, duties are eliminated on a specified number of goods (India-Thailand).

Union Minister Piyush Goyal with UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade Jonathan Reynolds **PHOTO: PTI**

What are the benefits of these pacts?

-Zero-duty entry into partner country markets helps in the diversification and expansion of export markets.

-Level playing field vis-a-vis competitors who may have already entered FTAs with partner countries.

How do countries protect the interest of domestic companies in these agreements?

FTAs provide for maintaining sensitive, negative or exclusion lists of items on which limited or no tariff concessions are granted.

With which countries has India signed these pacts?

India has inked trade deals with Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Korea, Japan, Australia, the UAE, Mauritius and ASEAN and EFTA blocs. According to think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), India has shifted its FTA focus from eastern (ASEAN, Japan, Korea) to western partners.

What are the major demands of India and the UK in this FTA?

India is looking for greater access for its students and professionals in the UK market, social security agreement, besides market access for several goods at nil customs duty. *—PTI*

Welspun One launches Rs 1K cr co-investment plan

MUMBAI, 26 FEB

Integrated fund and management development platform Welspun One on Wednesday announced the launch of a Rs 1,000 crore co-investment programme. This initiative will support its second Alternative Investment Fund (AIF), Fund 2, by providing dry powder to capitalise on a ready pipeline of 5 million sq ft, which is currently in the advanced stages of closure. With this expansion, the company's aggregate portfolio will grow to around 22 million sq ft, generating a projected net operating income of approximately Rs 1,100 crore (USD 130 million) upon completion, Welspun One said. India's logistics and industrial (L&I) sector is projected to grow at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of around 15 per cent year-on-year over the next two years crossing around 590 million sq ft by 2027, according to Welspun One. *—PTI*

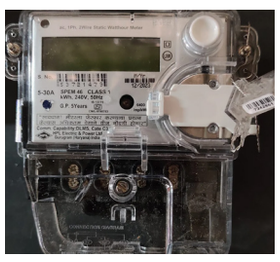


PHOTO:xxx

EDF, Actis join hands for smart meters in India

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

EDF India on Wednesday announced a strategic joint venture (JV) with Actis, a leading global investor in sustainable infrastructure, to deploy smart metering infrastructure. This collaboration aims to operate a dedicated platform company for Advanced Metering Infrastructure Service Provider (AMISP) concessions, reinforcing EDF India's and Actis' commitment to investing in the Indian power sector, a company statement said. Under this joint venture, EDF India and Actis will bring together their global expertise in energy solutions and infrastructure investments. *—PTI*

'India to increase ethanol blending with petrol to 20%'

GUWAHATI, 26 FEB

India is looking at increasing its target to blend ethanol with petrol to more than 20 per cent and has formed a committee under the NITI Aayog for this, Petroleum Minister Hardeep S Puri said on Wednesday. Addressing the Advantage Assam 2.0 business summit in Guwahati, he said 19.6 per cent blending has already been achieved. Puri said that the country has a capacity of 1,700 crore litre of blending, and already 1,500 crore litre are being utilised. With India spending USD 150 billion on different types of fuel imports, he said that one area where the attention is lacking is green hydrogen. Already, 2,00,000 sq km has been opened under the OALP, which is a mechanism that allows investors to bid for blocks of their choice based on E&P data. *—PTI*

Star Cement proposes ₹3,200 cr plant in Assam

GUWAHATI, 26 FEB

Star Cement Ltd has proposed to set up a ₹3,200-crore cement clinker and grinding plant in Assam. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in this regard was signed between the state government and the company on the concluding day of the Advantage Assam business summit on Wednesday, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said. Apart from this, an agreement was inked between the state government and Matheson Hydrogen Lvt Ltd, which is willing to set up a ₹1,500-crore hydrogen and steam generation plant. A total of 164 MoUs of investment proposals with companies in 15 sectors were signed on day one of the 'Advantage Assam 2.0 Investment and Infrastructure Summit 2025' on Tuesday. *—PTI*

Mumbai Police's Economic Offences Wing is conducting a probing into the embezzlement of Rs 122 crore at New India Cooperative Bank **PHOTO: X**

'New India Bank shows ₹122 cr vault capacity, holds ₹10 cr'

MUMBAI, 26 FEB

New India Cooperative Bank's Prabhadevi branch here had a capacity to keep Rs 10 crore at a time, but the cash in hand book showed there was Rs 122.028 crore in the safe on the day of RBI inspection, police have said.

The Mumbai Police's Economic Offences Wing (EOW) is conducting a probing into the embezzlement of Rs 122 crore at the New India Cooperative Bank and has so far arrested three persons, including two former top executives of the lender.

The balance sheet at the corporate office branch was showing Rs 133.41 crore at the bank's safe at Prabhadevi and Goregaon branches, and Rs 122.028 was the figure on the balance sheet of Prabhadevi branch on that day, he said.

During the probe, the EOW found the capacity of the safe at the corporate office to store cash was only Rs 10 crore, and they actually found Rs 60 lakh in the vault. At the Goregaon branch safe, they found Rs 10.53 crore cash on the day of the RBI inspection, according to the official.

Meanwhile, the EOW has summoned representatives of half-a-dozen firms which conducted audit of the fraud-hit lender at different times, another official said.

Bank's former CEO Abhimanyu Bhoan, who is among three persons arrested so far for the alleged fraud, had signed all audit reports and balance sheets of the bank, the official said. *—PTI*

Micro-credit disbursements decline 35.8% this fiscal: MFIN

KOLKATA, 26 FEB

Disbursement of microfinance loans has declined 35.8 per cent to Rs 22,091 crore during the third quarter ending December 2024 as compared to the similar previous corresponding period, Microfinance Institution Network (MFIN), an umbrella body of the microfinance institutions (MFIs), said in its report.

Assets under management (AUM) of the MFIs at the end of December 2024 stood at Rs 1,42,695 crore, showing a decrease of 0.1 per cent against the same period ending December 2023.

The average loan amount disbursed per account during the third quarter was Rs 51,691 crore, registering an increase of 15.2 per cent in comparison to the same quarter of the previous fiscal.

Portfolio at risk (PAR), defined as unpaid loans of more than 30 days, deteriorated to 8.8 per cent as of 31 December, 2024, compared to 3.5 per cent in the previous corresponding period ending 31 December, 2023, the report said.

During the current third quarter, NBFC-MFIs received debt funding of Rs 12,921 crore, mainly contributed by the banks. The total equity of the MFIs increased by 9.3 per cent during the current third quarter and stood at Rs 35,451 crore.

CEO and director MFIN Alok Misra said, "The industry is going through a period of curtailed funding due to stricter credit underwriting norms. The gross loan portfolio (GLP) of the sector as of December 31, 2024, stood at Rs 3,85,348 crore". *—PTI*

India needs 1.2-1.5 tax buoyancy to achieve 7% growth: EY

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

India has to maintain a tax buoyancy in the range of 1.2-1.5 to achieve a growth of 6.5-7 per cent, a EY report said on Wednesday.

The report also said that the government may need to strengthen revenue mobilisation, particularly by increasing the tax-to-GDP ratio from the estimated 12 per cent in FY26 (Budget Estimates) to 14 per cent by FY31.

India's fiscal strategy must focus on enhancing tax buoyancy, prudent expenditure management, and continued structural reforms to ensure sustainable growth, EY said.

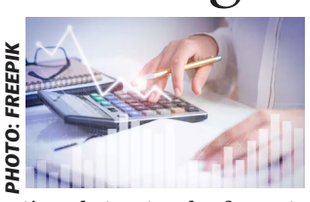


PHOTO: FREEPIK

The EY India Economy Watch report noted that over the past three years, gross tax revenue buoyancy has gently moderated, from 1.4 in FY24 to 1.15 in FY25 (RE) and projected to be 1.07 in FY26(BE). "Maintaining tax buoyancy in the 1.2-1.5 range could help the Government of India achieve 6.5-7.0 per cent GDP growth," the EY Report said.

Indian economy is projected to grow in the range of 6.3-6.8 per cent in the next fiscal. In the current fiscal, the GDP growth is estimated to be 6.4 per cent.

EY report further said that over the past decade, the government has reduced its fiscal deficit to GDP ratio from 4.1 per cent in FY15 to 3.4 per cent in FY19, with the ratio expected to adjust to 4.4 per cent by FY26. It needs to be steadily reduced to the FRBM level of 3%. *—PTI*

India's CRDMO sector can touch $25B: Report

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

India's Contract Research Development and Manufacturing Organisation (CRDMO) sector is at an inflection point, with the potential to grow to USD 22-25 billion by 2035, according to a report.

India currently holds a 2-3 per cent share of the USD 140-145 billion global CRDMO market but has the potential to become a global leader, according to the report by Boston Consulting Group (BCG) andInnovative Pharmaceutical Services Organisation (IPSO).

Four key tailwinds that are driving the sector growth include the push to de-risk supply chains, making India a preferred outsourcing destination.

Besides, pricing pressures and policies like the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) are accelerating offshoring and rising demand for advanced modalities like ADCs, gene therapy, and RNA therapeutics is boosting specialised CRDMO services, the report highlighted.

Further, growing investments in R&D and infrastructure are strengthening the country's innovation ecosystem, it added. *—PTI*

IndiGo to damp lease 3 more Boeing 787-9 for int'l expansion

MUMBAI, 26 FEB

Domestic carrier IndiGo on Wednesday said it will induct three more Boeing 787-9 planes in its fleet under a damp lease arrangement with Norse Atlantic Airways, as it prepares to launch flights to Europe from mid-summer this year.

Currently, the Gurugram-headquartered airline operates two widebody Boeing 777 planes, wet leased from Turkish Airlines, to Istanbul from Delhi and Mumbai.

The delivery of this first widebody B787 is on-track, and it is scheduled to start operations on the Delhi-Bangkok route from 1 March, 2025, IndiGo said in the statement.

IndiGo has signed "another firm agreement with Norse Atlantic Airways for damp lease of three Boeing 787-9 aircraft.

These aircraft will be arriving in India in the second half of 2025 and will be serving long-haul routes out of India," it said. *—PTI*

The delivery of this first widebody B787 is on-track, and it is scheduled to start operations on the Delhi-Bangkok route from 1 March **PHOTO: X**

SpiceJet posts Rs 26 cr profit

New Delhi, 26 FEB

Budget airline SpiceJet on Wednesday reported a profit after tax of Rs 26 crore for the three months ended December 2024, helped by overall improved performance. The carrier had posted a loss of Rs 300 crore in the year-ago period. Total revenue stood at Rs 1,077 crore in the 2024 September quarter. However, compared to Rs 2,149 crore reported in the three months ended December 2023, the total revenue is lower in December. The net worth stood at Rs 70 crore. *—PTI*

AT DELHI AIRPORT

DIAL: Higher tariffs will increase airfares upto 2%

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

The proposed tariff hike at the Delhi airport will result in 1.5 to 2 per cent increase in domestic airfares for passengers, according to top official.

The Delhi International Airport Ltd (DIAL) , which is operating the Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) in the national capital, has proposed different user fees for economy and business class passengers as well as for peak and off peak hours.

The airport has an annual passenger handling capacity of around 109 million.

DIAL CEO Videh Kumar Jaipuriar on Wednesday said the Yield Per Passenger (YPP) will rise to Rs 370 once the higher tariffs are approved from current level of Rs 145.

During the upgradation period coinciding with the T2 shutdown, the runway concerned will not be operational. Before temporarily shutting down T2, the renovated portion of T1 will be made operational.

Since taking over the airport in 2006, DIAL has invested Rs 30,000 crore, and Rs 25,000 crore has been given as part of revenue sharing to the Airports Authority of India (AAI). *—PTI*

'Critical minerals recovery needs multipronged plan'

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

Recovery of critical minerals from processing waste requires a multipronged strategy with policy reforms in India, according to a report.

Technological development, capacity building and supply chain integration are also needed for the recovery of these minerals from waste, according to a recent Ficci-Deloitte report.

Critical minerals are important for the growth of clean energy technologies, electric vehicles and battery manufacturing.

The demand for these minerals is increasing as the world transitions to clean energy. Critical minerals are also used in defence, such as in the production of aircraft, missiles, tanks, and corvettes, according to the report.

PHOTO: X

The country, it said, is steadily gearing its critical mineral resource security. However, challenges, such as low exploration levels, long gestation periods for mine operations, and bottlenecks in processing, highlight the need to look for alternative sources of critical minerals, with mine processing waste offering a solution.

India has a significant opportunity to reduce import dependence and advance sustainable mining by recovering critical minerals from mine tailings and waste.. *—PTI*

FOR MENTORSHIP, MKT ACCESS

Govt, Paytm ink deal for startup growth

NEW DELHI, 26 FEB

The government has inked an agreement with Paytm (One97 Communications Ltd) under which the company would provide mentorship, infrastructure support, market access, and funding opportunities to startups, an official statement said on Wednesday.

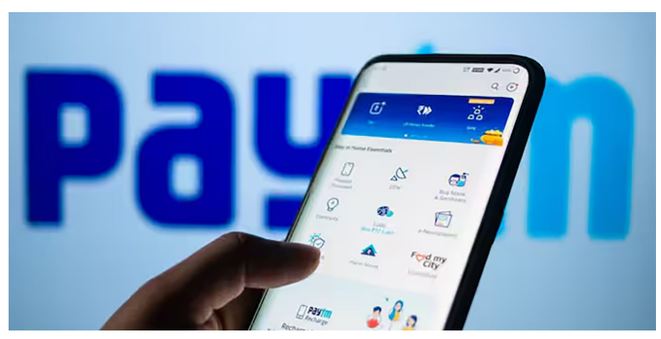
The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) with Paytm to foster innovation and accelerate the growth of manufacturing and fintech startups in India, the commerce and industry ministry said.

"As part of this collaboration, Paytm will provide mentorship, infrastructure support, market access, and funding opportunities to startups, helping them scale and innovate," it added.

This initiative, it said, aims to equip entrepreneurs with essential resources, enhancing their ability to develop cutting-edge payment and financial technology solutions.

Additionally, the partnership offers infrastructure and market access support, enabling startups to test, validate, and refine their products while leveraging Paytm's extensive merchant network.

The MoU was signed by Sumeet Kumar Jarangal, Director, DPIIT, and Vijay Shekhar Sharma, Founder & CEO, Paytm, in the presence of senior officials. As part of its Paytm for Startups initiative, the company will launch dedicated programs to support fintech hardware manufacturers. The DPIIT has earlier signed similar pacts with several firms including professional networking platform Apna; Rukam capital, Avaana capital, Bhaane Group, Flipkart, and ITC. *—PTI*



As part of its Paytm for Startups initiative, the company will launch dedicated programs to support fintech hardware manufacturers **PHOTO: PTI**

South Korea beat India 3-0 in Pink Ladies Cup match

SHARJAH, 26 FEB

The Indian senior women's team went down to Korea 0-3 in their concluding Pink Ladies Cup match at the Al Hamriya Sports Club Stadium here on Wednesday. The Koreans, placed 20th in the FIFA rankings, led 2-0 at halftime. While Choi Yoojung (8') and Choi Dagyeong (27') put the Korean Republic in the lead in the first half, Mun Eunju rounded off the tally in the 81st minute. In the Pink Ladies Cup, India played three matches winning the opener against Jordan, before losing to Russia and Korea. As expected, the Koreans proved too hot to handle and camped themselves in the Indian half right from the word go. Credit to Crispin Chettri's girls for closing the gaps early.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Saanvi takes lead in 4th leg of Hero WPGT

MUMBAI, 26 FEB

Vietnam-bound amateur Saanvi Somu played a bogey-free second round of two-under 68 to move into the lead in the fourth leg of the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour at the Bombay Presidency Golf Club here on Wednesday.The 16-year-old Saanvi has finished runner-up multiple times on the Hero WPGT, the latest of which was the first leg this season. After Mannat Brar was at the top a day earlier, Saanvi became the second amateur to take the spotlight this week.Saanvi, who will be in the Indian team at next week's Women's Amateur Asia-Pacific Championship, shot 73 in the first round.In the second round, she parred the first 11 holes before she found her first birdie on the Par-4 12th hole.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Bengaluru Open 2025: Ramanathan begin title defence

BENGALURU, 26 FEB

Defending doubles champions Ramkumar Ramanathan and Saketh commenced their 2025 Bengaluru Open journey with a straight-sets win over the Italian pair of Jacopo Berrettini and Enrico Dalla Valle at the KSLTA Courts on Wednesday. Defending doubles champions Ramkumar and Saketh commenced their 2025 Bengaluru Open journey with a straight-sets win over the Italian pair of Jacopo Berrettini and Enrico Dalla Valle at the KSLTA Courts on Wednesday—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Hamilton starts F1 pre-season testing for Ferrari

SAKHIR, 26 FEB

Lewis Hamilton has started Formula One pre-season testing for Ferrari. The 40-year-old British driver announced last year was leaving Mercedes to join Ferrari after spending 11 years and winning six of his seven world titles with the Silver Arrows. After Hamilton drove out of the garage Wednesday in the red car No. 44 at the circuit in Bahrain, F1's official social media site posted the message: "Lewis Hamilton. Ferrari driver Hamilton joined the team last month will line up in the 2025 season alongside Charles Leclerc, who has been at Ferrari since 2019.—*PTI*

Omarzai is star as Afghanistan knock Eng out of tournament

Thanks to Afghanistan opener Ibrahim Zadran's 177 runs

LAHORE, 26 FEB

Joe Root smashed a fine century under difficult circumstances but could not stop England's elimination from the Champions Trophy following a shock eight-run loss to Afghanistan here on Wednesday.

Thanks to Afghanistan opener Ibrahim Zadran's 177 runs, his highest one-day total, the team scored a massive 325/7 but despite Root's 111-ball 120, England missed the target.

Azmatullah Omarzai emerged the hero for Afghanistan, returning excellent figures of 5 for 58 and grabbing the crucial wicket of Root.

Earlier, Zadran notched up his total off 146 deliveries, while Shahidi struck 40 off 67 balls after Afghanistan was left struggling at 37 for 3 in the ninth over.

Ibrahim Zadran 177 in 146 balls

Zadran also shared a 72-run stand for the fifth wicket with Azmatullah Omarzai (41 off 31 balls) and a 111-run partnership for the sixth wicket with Mohammad Nabi (40 off 24 balls) while building a strong total.

Brief scores: Afghanistan 325 for 7 in 50 overs (Ibrahim Zadran 177, Hashmatullah Shahidi 40, Azmatullah Omarzai 41, Mohammad Nabi 40; Jofra Archer 3/64, Liam Livingstone 2/28).

England 317 all out in 49.5 overs (Ben Duckett 38, Joe Root 120, Jos Buttler 38, Jamie Overton 32; Azmatullah Omarzai 5/58, Mohammad Nabi 2/58). —*PTI*

Kohli rises to 5th in latest rankings

DUBAI, 26 FEB

India opener Shubman Gill on Wednesday consolidated his position atop the ICC ODI Batting Rankings after playing a big role in his team's qualification for the semifinals of the Champions Trophy.

Gill, who scored a match-winning 101 not out against Bangladesh and 46 against Pakistan in Group A matches played in Dubai this past week, has gained 21 rating points and moved up to 817 rating points, increasing the gap with second-placed Babar Azam from 23 to 47 points.

Virat Kohli's unbeaten 100 against Pakistan has helped him overtake Daryl Mitchell of New Zealand to fifth position while KL Rahul has moved up two places to 15th position after notching an unbeaten 41 against Bangladesh. —*PTI*

This Indian team is ruthless: Rajput

For Lalchand Rajput, it was a plunge into an unknown territory when he was appointed manager of a young Indian team for the inaugural T20 World Cup in 2007. No one gave them a chance, but they still triumphed. Nearly 18 years later, the 63-year-old former player is backing an Indian team full of world beaters to not just win another prestigious ICC event but do so convincingly. "This Indian team looks ruthless. They try to dominate and win every game. They don't want to give the opponents a chance to come back into the game. That is the attitude. And the way they are playing, I think they should win the Champions Trophy convincingly," Rajput told PTI. —*PTI*

Knocked out of tournament, Pak to play for pride

RAWALPINDI, 26 FEB

Their dreams of defending the Champions Trophy title at home shattered, an under-fire Pakistan team will seek to play for pride when it faces an equally insipid Bangladesh in a dead rubber here on Thursday.

With the tournament offering a tiny margin for error, Pakistan crumbled to suffer heavy defeats to New Zealand and arch-rivals India, which left them on the brink of elimination before the Kiwis confirmed it with their win over Bangladesh. Disgruntled fans are now calling for sweeping changes in the country's cricket structure starting from the very top of the pyramid, days after the first global tournament in Pakistan in 29 years got underway. This marks the third time Pakistan has bowed out in the group stages of a global white-ball tournament, following early exits in the 2024 T20 World Cup and the 2023 ODI World Cup.

At a time when teams have embraced a fearless, aggressive approach, Pakistan seemed to be stuck in the past. —*PTI*

CHAMPIONS TROPHY

GROUP A	M	W	L	PT
1. NZ	2	2	0	4
2. IND	2	2	0	4
3. BAN	2	0	2	0
4. PAK	2	0	2	0
GROUP B	**M**	**W**	**L**	**PT**
1. SA	2	1	0	3
2. AUS	2	1	0	3
3. ENG	2	0	2	0
4. AFG	2	0	1	2

PHOTO: PTI

PRAGGNANANDHAA TAKES ON NAVARA IN PRAGUE MASTERS

PRAGUE, 26 FEB

On a high after his triumph at Tata Steel Masters, Indian Grandmaster Praggnanandhaa got a good draw and will take on local star David Navara in the first round of the Prague Masters here. Starting as the second seed, Praggnanandhaa will have his task cut out with the white pieces against Navara, who has been around for a long time as one of the top European players.

Praggnanandhaa will have five games as white in the 10-player 9-round tournament which adds to his advantage of being one of the top favourites to annex the crown.

The other Indian in the fray, Aravindh Chithambaram, will start his campaign against another local player, Nguyen Thai Dai Van, who impressed everyone recently by winning the challengers section of the Tata Steel tournament and qualified for the premium event in 2026. In other games of the opening round, top seed Wei Yi of China will have black pieces against German Vincent Keymer, Dutch Anish Giri will also start as black against Le Quang Leim of Vietnam, while American Sam Shankland will have a slightly favorable color against 16-year-old Turkish talent Gurel Ediz.

Praggnanandhaa will have white games against Dai Van, Aravindh, Wei Yi, and Quang Leim as the tournament progresses. The Indian has a last-round game with Giri, who is also tipped for a podium finish and is someone who can turn things around. —*PTI*

NBA: LUKA DROPS TRIPLE-DOUBLE TO STUN DALLAS MAVERICKS

NEW YORK, 26 FEB

Luka Doncic had 19 points, 15 rebounds and 12 assists in his first game against the Dallas Mavericks since it traded him to the Lakers, leading Los Angeles to a 107-99 victory on Tuesday night.

Doncic secured his first triple-double with the Lakers on an emotional night for the Slovenian superstar, who was blindsided by the seismic trade sending him to Los Angeles for Anthony Davis three weeks ago.

Doncic warmly greeted his former teammates but also took a few portentous looks at the Mavs' bench during the night. He struggled with his shot, going 6 of 17, but capped a superb playmaking performance with an assist to LeBron James for a clinching layup with 32 seconds left.

James helped his new teammate by scoring 16 of his 27 points in the fourth quarter while Los Angeles held on for its third straight win and its 13th in 16 games.

Kyrie Irving scored 35 points and Klay Thompson added 22 for the Mavericks.

Dallas general manager Nico Harrison, who is reviled by many Mavs fans for making the trade, was serenaded by Lakers fans chanting "Thank you, Nico!"Mavericks: Max Christie scored all 10 of his points in the first half.

He was traded along with Davis by the Lakers, who drafted him. —*PTI*

WOMEN'S PREMIER LEAGUE

RCB looks to put Super Over loss behind against GG

BENGALURU, 26 FEB

Smarting from their dramatic Super Over loss in the Women's Premier League, Royal Challengers Bengaluru will aim to get back on track when they take on bottom-placed Gujarat Giants here on Thursday.

The defending champions started strong with two commanding wins, but consecutive defeats against Mumbai Indians and UP Warriorz have halted their momentum.

With Delhi Capitals surging to the top of the table after their victory on Tuesday, RCB will be desperate to return to winning ways.

Meanwhile, Gujarat Giants continue to languish at the bottom of the points table, having managed just one win in four outings.

Their latest defeat to Delhi Capitals was particularly dismal, as they barely scraped past the 100-run mark.

The loss to UP Warriorz will sting Smriti Mandhana and Co. the most, as they were in control for much of the game but failed to defend 42 runs in the last three overs, leading to a Super Over, where they could muster only four runs.

"Disappointing to be on the losing side today. We did a lot of things right with both bat and ball, but things faltered towards the end. We will take that in our stride and come back stronger," Mandhana said after the match.

Mandhana herself has struggled for form, registering just one big knock in four innings. Off-spin remains her Achilles' heel, having been dismissed by it 11 times in the WPL more than any other batter. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Ranji Trophy final: Malewar's unbeaten ton takes Vidarbha to 254/4 on day 1

NAGPUR, 26 FEB

A horrible mix-up between Karun Nair (86) and Danish Malewar (138 not out) denied the former a deserving century but their much-needed resistance took Vidarbha to a formidable 254/4 at stumps on the opening day of the Ranji Trophy final against Kerala here on Wednesday.

Nair and Malewar led a strong fightback for the hosts at the VCA Stadium after Kerala seamers struck early thrice to leave Vidarbha struggling at 24 for three. The pair put on a resolute 215-run stand for the fourth wicket consuming as many as 414 deliveries across the three sessions, mixing caution with aggression to give Vidarbha a strong footing in the summit clash. But it ended abruptly against the flow of the game when both Nair and Malewar went for a non-existent run which ended up in the dismissal of the former, 14 runs short of a deserving century.

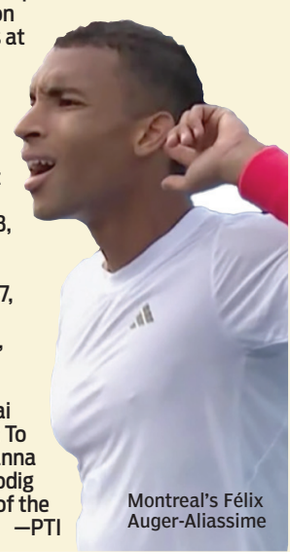
Having toiled for a breakthrough for nearly 68 overs, Kerala opted for a late second new ball in the 82nd over. Eden Apple Tom's innocuous delivery outside the off-stump saw the new red cherry swinging more than expected, forcing the wicketkeeper Mohammed Azharuddeen to move to his right to collect the ball between him and the first slip.

Brief scores: Vidarbha 254/4 in 86 overs (Danish Malewar 138*, Karun Nair 86; MD Nidheesh 2/33) vs Kerala. —*PTI*

Danish Malewar

AUGER REACHES QFS AT DUBAI

Montreal's Félix Auger-Aliassime rallied past Portugal's Nuno Borges 4-6, 6-3, 7-5 on Wednesday to reach the quarterfinals at the Dubai Tennis Championships. Auger-Aliassime broke Borges late in the third set before sealing the win with his ninth ace. The world No. 21 converted three of 10 break chances while saving four of six against him. It was Auger-Aliassime's first career meeting with Borges, the world No. 38, on the ATP Tour. Auger-Aliassime will next face Marin Cilic of Croatia, who defeated Australia's Alexei Popyrin 5-7, 6-3, 6-4. The 24-year-old Canadian is chasing his third ATP title this season, having won last month in Adelaide, Australia, and Montpellier, France. Rohan Bopanna Knocked Out Of Dubai Tennis Championships; India Lose 0-2 To Korea In Pink Ladies Cup. Rohan Bopanna and his men's doubles partner Ivan Dodig were knocked out of the Round of 16 of the Dubai Tennis Championships —PTI



Montreal's Félix Auger-Aliassime

Barcelona and Madrid draw 4-4 in thrilling game

Alexander Sorloth

MADRID, 26 FEB

Goals down in a frantic 4-4 draw in the first leg of the Copa del Rey semifinal at Estadi Olimpic Lluis Companys in Catalonia, Spain.

Atletico scored twice in the first six minutes before conceding four unanswered goals and coming back to even the match with goals in the final 10 minutes, including the equaliser by substitute Alexander Sorloth three minutes into stoppage time on Tuesday. Atletico pulled closer with Marcos Llorente in the 84th and Sorloth got the equaliser from close range.

The second leg will be at Atletico's Metropolitano Stadium in April.

The winner will play either Real Madrid or Real Sociedad, which will play their first-leg match on Wednesday in Basque Country.

Barcelona last won the competition in 2021, and Atletico in 2013.Atletico had beaten Barcelona 2-1 in the Spanish league when the teams last met in December.

Until the semifinal stage, the Copa's knockout rounds were played in single-elimination games. —*PTI*

CONCACAF CHAMPIONS CUP

Messi strikes early, Inter beats Sporting KC 3-1

FORT LAUDERDALE, 26 FEB

Lionel Messi opened the scoring with a masterful strike in the 19th minute, and Inter Miami beat Sporting Kansas City 3-1 on Tuesday night in the second leg of the CONCACAF Champions Cup's first round.

Luis Suárez and Tadeo Allende also scored as Inter Miami advanced with a 4-1 aggregate to face Jamaica Premier League champion Cavalier FC in the round of 16 on March 6. Messi also scored in Miami's 1-0 win at Kansas City in the first leg last Wednesday.

Memo Rodríguez scored for Kansas City — the team's first goal of 2025.

Inter Miami forward Lionel Messi
PHOTO: X

Miami scored on all three of its first-half shots despite Kansas City getting the majority of opportunities early, with six shots and three on goal.

Messi slipped a through ball to Suárez, then controlled Suárez's pass off his chest and rifled it past John Pulskamp into the bottom right corner. Messi also started Miami's second scoring opportunity with a perfectly placed ball into the path of Jordi Alba, who found Allende for the finish in the 45th minute.

Two minutes later, a misplayed touch by Kansas City's Jacob Davis led to Suárez's difficult goal that he bounced past Pulskamp.

"There is this level of quality that guys like Messi, Suarez (bring)," Kansas City coach Peter Vermes said.

"They know the moments in the game. They just know them. —*PTI*

Chelsea rout Southampton 4-0

On a frustrating evening for the England star, his Chelsea teammates stepped up as demanded by their manager to share the goals in a 4-0 thrashing of last-place Southampton in the Premier League on Tuesday. Christopher Nkunku and Marc Cucurella were the scorers as Chelsea ended a three-match losing run by beating a team destined to go down. —*PTI*